

History of preparations for the WHUUF Five Year Plan  
Written by John Bishop, Board President, 2004

During the recent discussions about the WHUUF Board's proposed Five Year Plan, some have asked to have a more detailed description of how the Board came to this point of proposing the Plan. I am no longer on the WHUUF Board, but I was on the Board from approximately 2003 through June 2007, and I was President of the Board from Fall 2004 through June 2006. I am now the chair of WHUUF's Long Range Planning Council (LRPC). Based on that experience, I believe I can provide a decent account of the long (approximately 5-year) road that the WHUUF Board and other committees have traveled in order to come to this point. I stress that the following account is mine, alone, and has not been authored or influenced by any other member of the Board or any of the other committees I will refer to. I will try to keep my account objective and factual. My purpose is simply to help members be better informed when they cast their vote on the proposed Plan at the annual meeting:

I have been a member of WHUUF since around 2000. Since I joined, there have been at least two efforts to address whether we would modify and/or expand our buildings and, if so, how we should do it. One of those efforts, which started prior to 2003, failed because, at some point in the process, there were complaints that the Board was not considering all of the varying interests of our members. Later, a professional consultant told the Board that it would be foolhardy to start a capital campaign to raise money for building modifications without more "buy in" from the congregation.

So the Board stepped back. It hired a professional consultant recommended by the UUA and it asked him to conduct an assessment of our fellowship to determine whether it was ready to support a capital campaign. This was in approximately February 2003. The consultant, by the way, was not a minister. He came and spent a long weekend at our fellowship. He talked with as many members as were willing to come to meetings with him and he attended our Sunday service. After his visit, he wrote an extensive assessment of our fellowship. The Board has shared that written assessment with the fellowship on a number of occasions over the years since it was issued. The ultimate conclusion of the assessment was that our membership needed to re-evaluate and re-declare its "mission" or purpose before it would be ready to support a capital campaign. And the consultant recommended that we conduct a "visioning" process to determine the desires of our congregation.

On October 10, 2004, we held the visioning session recommended by the consultant. This meeting was well-publicized and well-attended. Over 80 members participated. It was an all-day meeting. The Board took members' input from that meeting and distilled it into three main congregational "visions" which were:

1. Brighter, functional, multi-use spaces.
2. Inspiring integration of sanctuary and grounds.

3. Guidance in lay-led spiritual growth.

There were also a number of “secondary” visions, which were stated, with a little less clarity and volume. They were:

4. Two services with more youth involvement
5. More young people and families attending
6. Increased transportation options
7. Greater tolerance and social awareness

Beginning in 2005, the Board started a process toward “implementing” the congregation’s three main visions. The Board decided to focus mainly on the first two visions – what to do about our buildings and grounds – since they were closely related. The Board announced and discussed its plans for how it would go about implementing the fellowship’s visions at the 2005 Annual membership meeting.

The Board appointed a “Space Assessment and Modification (SAM) Task Force” to develop ideas for ways we might improve our buildings and facilities. That Task Force held many meetings. Its recommendations were presented to the fellowship at the 2006 Annual membership meeting. A straw vote was taken and the members present voted overwhelmingly in favor of working toward a “middle of the road” proposal for expanding and/or modify our buildings. But the members also asked for more discussions about the plans over the summer. So the ideas for what to do about our buildings and grounds were discussed at virtually all the potlucks and at other meetings during summer 2006. Members of the SAM Task Force took notes on all the comments members made during these discussions.

In September 2006, a congregational meeting was held. At the meeting, the Long Range Planning Council (LRPC) reported on the results of the summer discussions about modifying our buildings. This meeting was, once again, well-publicized. Only about 40 members, attended, however. At the meeting, the LRPC recommended that the members approve a motion to the Board to appoint a standing committee that would develop a process for finding and hiring professionals to assist us in developing a building design which would meet the needs and desires of our members. An overwhelming majority of the members attending the meeting voted in favor of making this motion to the Board.

In response to the congregation’s motion, the Board appointed a committee, now known as the Shaping Our Legacy Committee. The committee began its work in approximately November/December 2006. After deliberating over a selection process and then carefully following that process, the Shaping Our Legacy Committee found a team of architects to recommend to the Board. For a period, the Shaping Our Legacy Committee was meeting at least twice a month and it was reporting on its progress regularly through announcements at Sunday Service and through newsletter reports. The architect team that the Shaping Our Legacy Committee decided on consists of Liz Miller and Jeff Stern. In October 2007, the Committee and the Board held another well-publicized congregational meeting to present Liz Miller and Jeff

Stern to the congregation and to explain to the congregation the process that had been followed to pick them as our professional team. A straw vote was taken among the members present at the meeting (again, fewer than 40 members attended the meeting), and those attending voted overwhelmingly to approve the Board's decision to hire Liz and Jeff.

During fall 2007, Liz and Jeff held as many meetings with WHUUF committees and other "stakeholders" in the fellowship that they could arrange. The Shaping Our Legacy Committee reported regularly at Sunday Services and in the newsletter that these meetings were being held. Committee members and the Board urged people to attend any meeting they could (and as many as they desired) in order to provide Liz and Jeff with their ideas about how they would like to see the buildings modified — or not. Following this lengthy process of taking input from WHUUF members and friends, Liz and Jeff developed a rough plan and design for modifying our buildings which responded to the input they received from their conversations with WHUUF members and friends. They presented their plan and design to the full fellowship at a congregational meeting held after a Sunday service. The meeting was announced repeatedly at Sunday services and in the newsletter. Only about 30 to 40 members attended to see the architects presentation. Since that presentation, the Shaping Our Legacy Committee has been seeking input from members and friends about the architects' proposal after every Sunday Service. The opportunity for people to provide input about the proposal has been announced regularly at Sunday Services and in the newsletter.

In the meantime, during the period that the Shaping Our Legacy Committee was working on finding an architect team (i.e. in June 2007), some members of the Committee and members of the LRPC met with Wayne Clark, the UUA's Director of Congregational Stewardship Services (i.e. the UUA's expert on fundraising and capital campaigns). They met with Mr. Clark at the UUA General Assembly in Portland. WHUUF representatives told Mr. Clark about the process that the Fellowship had followed to move toward modifying and/or expanding its buildings. Mr. Clark initially reacted positively to the steps that the Fellowship had taken. But he then cautioned that the Fellowship would have to come to some definite decisions as a group about growth and staff support, before it could proceed effectively to raise money and complete a building project. (I want to stress here that Mr. Clark was not saying that the UUA would insist upon the Fellowship deciding to grow before it would help WHUUF financially. The WHUUF representatives were not approaching Mr. Clark to determine how they could get UUA financial support for our building project. They were simply attempting to get advice about how best to conduct a capital campaign and Mr. Clark is a well-known expert on that topic). Mr. Clark encouraged us to find a way for the fellowship to have discussions about growth and about what we wanted in the way of staff support. He also encouraged us to do so in a way that result in the congregation making some definitive decisions about those issues. His words were that you cannot "finesse" these issues if you are going to attempt to raise funds for a significant building project. I don't believe that Mr. Clark was stressing that we should decide to grow or to change are staff. I believe he was simply recommending that we attempt to get a clear sense of our membership's desires in these areas – one way or the other – before we launch any type of capital campaign for a building project.

Although Wayne Clark's advice suggested that we may have "got the cart before the horse" a bit in our building plans, the LRPC and the Shaping Our Legacy Committee did not want to derail all of the hard work that already had been done to that point to select an architect

team for our proposed project. So, the Shaping Our Legacy Committee kept working toward hiring the team of Liz Miller and Jeff Stern and toward getting an initial rough proposal for some building modifications. In the meantime, the LRPC recommended to the Board in November 2007 that it hire Rev. Bob Schaibly as a consulting minister for six months. The LRPC based its recommendation on advice from the District Executive for the UUA's Pacific Northwest District. It was recommended that Rev. Schaibly be hired to facilitate dialogue among the congregation on the issues of "growth," and staff support – with staff support being both for administrative and spiritual purposes. The LRPC recommended that Rev. Schaibly should facilitate discussion on these topics for the purpose of "goal-setting." The Board announced its decision to hire Rev. Schaibly at Sunday Services and in the newsletter. The Board set up two meetings to allow members to meet with Rev. Schaibly and to hear what the purpose of his employment would be. These meetings were fairly well-attended by members and friends.

Rev. Schaibly began in his role as WHUUF's quarter-time consulting minister effective January 1, 2008. He held several "Conversations" with members and friends at various times during the week. These meetings were announced at Sunday Services and in the newsletter and by Rev. Schaibly when he spoke. At least one or two members of the LRPC and the Board attended each of the "Conversations." At the conclusion of his "Conversations," Rev. Schaibly prepared a written report on his findings and he presented it to the Long Range Planning Council and the Board. From that report, the LRPC and certain members of the Board developed the proposed Five Year Plan which is now being discussed. The LRPC recommended to the Board that the proposed Plan be submitted to the membership for a vote at the Annual Meeting. The LRPC did not make this proposal in order to "force" anything on the membership. Its purpose was to allow the membership to state in a democratic way whether the LRPC and the Board have properly "read" the desires and interests of the membership. The LRPC believed that the Board would need this kind of information before it could proceed effectively on its plans for building modifications and/or expansion. As I said at the beginning, this "plan" for some kind of building modification and/or expansion began over five years ago – before 2003.

For those who would like to know even more about the different meetings and decisions that are referenced above, I would encourage you review the minutes of the Board's meetings, which are kept compiled in the WHUUF office and are available for all members to review. Also, the minutes of the annual membership meetings should be available in the WHUUF office.