

Planning Committee update for Meeting for Worship for Business - 9/12/2010

[Note: for logistical or other reasons, Loie Clark and Judy Hubbard have not commented on this report, so the report represents the input of Ken Forsberg, Susan Lepper and Faith Williams.]

The current Planning Committee – Susan Lepper (co-clerk), Ken Forsberg (co-clerk), Loie Clark, Faith Williams, and Judy Hubbard – has had significant challenges. Over-stretched members, loss of members, and wide differences in approach to decision-making, aesthetics, and priorities have caused the committee to be progressively less functional and able to reach unity, and in August we came to agreement that the current incarnation of the committee was not workable.

Let us be clear: *the Meeting is not “stuck.”* Planning Committee has just had problems reaching unity in its work to lead the Meeting forward. The Meeting is midway through a process of discernment regarding design choices that is necessary and typical. Making changes to meeting houses is traditionally very difficult for meetings.

The current Planning Committee and one of the Meeting Co-Clerks have conferred and approved the following plan for moving forward:

- Nominating will propose a new slate of members for a newly reinforced Planning Committee. The new committee will (we hope) be larger, ideally with representation from relevant committees.
- Simultaneously, David Etheridge, Co-Clerk of the Meeting, has formed a small ad hoc committee to help him take up the fourth charge given to the Planning Committee: “to draw together the threads of a possibly emerging consensus about a comprehensive renovation as these threads emerge from a range of ad hoc discussions within the Meeting.”

The hope is that these two committees can help move the Meeting forward to unity on an elevator and renovation concept sufficient to allow a capital campaign to commence.

Note that we do not need to decide everything about the project now. We need to agree on a concept fleshed out enough for the capital campaign. Once that campaign has proceeded for enough time to provide a clearer sense of how much money we will have at our disposal, at that point we will face decisions about what if any additional funds we want to make available through borrowing or other means, and/or what modifications we might want to make to the project to fit the funding we have available. Once those decisions are made, our architects would proceed with more detailed designs, as directed by our decisions, and subsequently would begin submissions for historical, neighborhood, and regulatory review.

While the current Planning Committee had significant challenges, it nevertheless accomplished a lot on which we want to report. The Committee collected much thoughtful feedback from Friends on the concept proposed by our architects, spent much time and energy considering the concerns and suggestions we received, and collected additional information from our architects and others to inform those considerations.

In our deliberations on the feedback received, we reached agreement on the following recommendations as a committee:

1. An addition west of the building still makes the most sense for the elevator location. Various internal locations were (again) deemed undesirable because of crowding, loss of office/meeting/education space, non-central locations and related security concerns.
2. The ramping proposed for the Decatur Place Room is not desirable; an entrance through or next to where the vault is currently, with ramping inside the room at its north end, would be better. Our architects think this is workable, and this change will remove necessity for any change to the Decatur Place door to the Meeting House.
3. IF childcare, First Day School and other space use considerations allow it, we recommend – as part of the work on the Meeting House itself – expanding the Assembly Room to the north, into the current Children’s Library and hallway, replacing the eastern half of the north wall of the Assembly Room with a foldable barrier so the additional space could still be separated for RE/childcare/committee use as needed. Our architects think this idea has merit and estimate the cost to be reasonable in our view.
4. Building the elevator up to the third floor (as depicted in the current plans) would be worth the marginal additional cost (relative to stopping at the second floor).
5. Covering the proposed path from Decatur Place to the proposed new main entrance is unnecessary, but could be added later if needed.
6. A ramp in the front of the Meeting House outside the Terrace Room, from the terrace to the door outside the south entrance to the Meeting Room, would have some additional accessibility convenience but not enough, in our judgement, to justify the added cost and aesthetic disruption of the front of the building.
7. If the proposed additional stairway stays in the design, we should still keep the existing stairway (between the hallway outside the south end of the Meeting Room and the downstairs hallway) because of the beauty of the existing stairway and the usefulness of having two stairways for traffic flow up and down.

Major items on which we did not reach unity, or that have arisen as points of concern that need further threshing:

- A. What design is desirable for a connector from the elevator to the Carriage House and Quaker House, and how much of it to include in this project (as opposed to some future project). The Meeting approved exploring this option at the July MfB, and we now have information and proposed drawings from the architects for further consideration.
- B. The overall size and/or location of the proposed new lobby and stairway.
- C. Whether to include conversion of the SW window of the Meeting Room into a door into the new stair lobby. This is proposed by the architects to ease traffic flow and way-finding between our two large spaces. We have new material from our architects to help with discernment on this question.

- D. The desirability of the location of the proposed new main entrance to the Meeting House on the west side of the building (with path leading there from the property entrance on Decatur Place).
- E. How much of the upgrade work proposed by the architects for the Meeting House should be included, especially in light of the upgrade needs in the Carriage House and Quaker House. This question was one we didn't get to considering. We note that a significant portion of the work proposed is work on the Meeting House that is not directly necessary to add the elevator or prevent flooding, but is instead deferred maintenance and upgrades (including highly desirable life safety upgrades such as installing sprinklers) that it would seem wise to do as long as walls are being knocked out and construction teams mobilized.

Many details in the proposed plans are small enough that they will be dealt with at later stages of the process and do not need to be wrestled with now.

The current cost estimate for the project of \$3.8 million applies to the plan as currently proposed by our architects. As the design issues listed above are settled, and other ways to reduce costs are found, that estimate will be adjusted up or down as appropriate.

While no design will please everyone, our goal remains to arrive at a plan that most of us can unify around, take ownership of, and find common, joyful purpose in, and that with such a plan, we can all turn our attention from plans and buildings back to nurturing ourselves and one another, and to letting our lives speak in a world that needs us.