Recapping the Focus Sessions

Thank you to those who were able to participate in the September Focus Sessions regarding the Bothell UMC project to expand into the urban core of the City! It was a great time of sharing with lots of healthy and helpful conversation as we continue to look towards how God is leading our congregation.

The vision for this Bothell Urban project is not only to create a welcoming space in the Downtown Bothell core as an extension of who we are as Bothell UMC, but also as an ideal location to build much needed affordable housing. We can do this with no financial burden to our current congregation if we repurpose our excess land by selling it in order to purchase land in downtown Bothell. After detailed conversations with brokers, developers and our real estate attorney, we are fully confident that our excess property can be sold for a price that is commensurate with purchasing land in the Downtown Core.

We are excited about the passion and energy towards this vision, and mindful of areas in which more information is still needed. The questions, comments and responses that have been presented to the leadership committee are outlined below:

Developing Downtown:

**Why do we want a presence in downtown Bothell?** There is a noticeable lack of Human Services for people in our Northshore area. City staffers, the school district and human services agencies all recognize that people in Bothell find it difficult to find assistance nearby. In addition, current research shows increasing numbers of people who are lonely, disconnected from their neighbors and have a mistrust of religion. Homelessness is at a crisis point, and a lack of affordable housing is a part of that problem. Increasing density, Senior Housing and the University of Washington and Cascadia College are bringing thousands of people to the downtown area in the next few years. Transit centers are increasing allowing mobility in the downtown area. The Church is called to be a faithful presence in the midst of this.

**If we own the property downtown and a developer builds the building, who is liable for problems with the building that the tenants might encounter?** These are the kinds of agreements that will need to be negotiated with our intended partner who will be the developer of the building and the operator of the housing.
What additional costs do we expect beyond just the purchase of the property? Some of this will depend on our partner and what we negotiate. We are looking at ways that our space could be self-sustaining through grants, renting the space or other creative uses.

Do we envision working with other faith communities in developing the downtown presence? At this point, in purchasing property, it doesn’t seem necessary to complicate the project with more purchasing partners. However, we think it is a good idea to look for other partners in the future, perhaps for programs or other offerings at the downtown location.

What gaps has the city of Bothell already identified? City staff and electeds have mentioned the lack of space for access to human services. In addition, they are very aware of the need for Affordable Housing.

Since the vision for the 1st floor usage is wide open, how can we put bounds on what it should be? The intention of this space is to offer an extension of who we are as Bothell United Methodist Church. It will need to be a reflection of Bothell UMC and be in accordance with our purpose and mission as well as be compatible with our core values. We will operate out of the ground floor “retail” space, with affordable housing above in accordance with zoning codes and limits of 5 floors. Details of this will be worked in the future, but recent affordable housing structures look fairly contemporary, and an artist rendering could be supplied soon for those who want some sort of visual.

Parking isn’t good downtown, and there aren’t grocery stores within walking distance, what about that? The people in this area are struggling with wanting to drive everywhere in cars, but then complaining there is too much traffic and not enough parking. As members of this community, we can offer our support for the development of more people-oriented-spaces, not car-oriented roads, so that people can live near where they work, shop and socialize. Building housing downtown is one step closer to this idea. We can’t control where the grocery stores go, but we can voice our desire to the city to encourage a local grocery store for the 4000 residents of the downtown core, so they can walk and not have to find parking when they shop for groceries, dine out, or gather at our space.

What is affordable housing and does it have other support structures for people with special needs? Housing is deemed affordable when the cost is 30% or less of a person’s income. The Area Median Income (AMI) in our area is $77,250 for a single person. This means that this person can afford rent at $1931 per month. However, if a person earns less than the median income, the ability to pay rent decreases and they become cost-burdened. Affordable Housing is housing that is built to be affordable by people earning 80%, 60%, 50% or 30% of the AMI in our area. These are people who may be working in retail, service, or entry level jobs. Sometimes people are in low wage jobs due to developmental or physical limitations, therefore there are also housing developments that concentrate some services to meet specific needs.

It’s hard enough to take care of this current property, and get volunteers at this current property how will we add another one? The sale of land and the plans around the Bothell Urban project will not impact the necessary work that needs to happen around our current location. We know that there are needs in and outside our building. Unfortunately, the rules that
we are governed by do not permit the use of funds from land/property sale to support the work of existing operating budget items and repairs. We will work to address these internal issues through another process soon. This new space will provide invitation and encouragement for the people in the downtown core to belong and gather. While we hope that the people who currently call Bothell UMC home also support the activity at this downtown space, we anticipate people who aren’t currently affiliated with us to begin to call this space home.

**What will we do in downtown Bothell?** Bothell UMC Urban needs to recognize the needs in the surrounding community and be able to respond. With a downtown presence, we could begin by being a gathering space, open to all people. In addition, we could offer activities and programs on topics that offer people paths towards wholeness. Worship and spiritual growth could be offered in creative ways. Partnerships could be developed that offer job training in a restaurant, deli, or café. The opportunities are endless!

**How will we build on the downtown property?** The vision of purchasing land in downtown Bothell includes partnering with a developer who is experienced in building affordable multistory housing. In a ground lease agreement, the developer could build on our land in exchange for granting us the use of the ground floor space.

**How will we afford to be in downtown Bothell?** There are likely a few possibilities of how the Bothell UMC Urban project would be sustainable. These include being a ministry of Bothell UMC, applying for grants, creating revenue opportunities with other non-profit agencies, subleasing space, and more.

**Questions about selling our excess property:**

**Why are we selling property?** There is property on the West side of our parking lot that has not been used for an intentional purpose for over 50 years. It does get used occasionally for games, and so we do have wonderful volunteers who do their best to maintain it. There are other options for people who need a large space to play games across the street at the high school and on our front lawn. The property is zoned for residential use and we do not see it as a part of our mission to build and develop residential property. This property is a financial asset that could be repurposed for our purpose of *Becoming Christ in the Community*.

**What about the Community Gardens?** The gardens are an asset to the community and provide real tangible benefits to the neighborhood. Due to the way the parcels are, the property that would be for sale is the parcel that includes the gardens. We can set parameters for the preservation or relocation of garden space with any potential buyer as it is a possibility that the gardens may need to be adjusted in some way.

**Are we selling ALL our property, are we moving?** No. We will stay on Westhill. Purchasing property in downtown Bothell would be in addition to the property on which our church building currently sits and our parking lot.

**Who will buy our property?** The buyer for this parcel would likely be a residential developer. There are city zoning codes that regulate what can be built on the property. Our goal would be
to engage interested parties in conversation so that their vision aligns with the current housing styles in the neighborhood and a desire to maintain good relations in the neighborhood.

**Have we thought about working with Habitat for Humanity to develop our own property?** Habitat for Humanity typically looks for gifts of land or for prices well below the market value. We feel that this would not allow us enough flexibility in purchasing land in the downtown market.

**Have we had an appraisal done yet?** An official appraisal has been done on our excess property. This figure and information is not being published at this time due to our potential financial negotiations.

**Can we develop our current property into smaller units, condos or a cottage community that would be affordable for small families or singles?** The excess property is zoned and governed by the City of Bothell. It is zoned for single family homes. Our desire for the parameters of our sale maintain that the buyer build homes commensurate with the neighborhood and that they creatively utilize density and open space requirements in order to keep the homes as affordable as possible.

**Questions about Process:**

**Do we have the assistance of a financial advisor?** We have not engaged a financial advisor, however we are being advised and supported by the Treasurer and Director of Administrative Services at the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church (PNWUMC), as well as the Committee on Building and Location for the PNWUMC. In addition, we have entered into an agreement with a local Real Estate Attorney who was recommended to us by Edmonds UMC and the PNWUMC.

**Does this need to be voted on by the Congregation?** Members of Bothell UMC will vote on whether or not they approve the idea of selling the land and will also vote on whether or not to buy land. The Book of Discipline limits what those proceeds from the sale of land can be used for and this vision is in accordance with those rules.

**Is this part of the Governing Board 3-year plan?** No. In 2015, the then-Church Council 2.0 developed a 3-year plan that expired in 2018. While we continue to address the tenants of that plan, like cultivating discipleship groups in intentional faith development and growing in service, this Bothell Urban vision is a new thing that we believe God is doing.

**Have we considered working with the same developer for both properties?** The developer that we work with for the downtown purchase will need to be a non-profit, experienced developer, knowledgeable about the various funding resources for this kind of development. These developers typically look for free, or below-market rates on land, which is why we are an attractive partner for the downtown project. The excess land on our current property is zoned single family residential, and the likely buyer would be a for-profit developer who agrees with our value of building homes commensurate with the neighborhood, and who will pay us fair market value for our land. If that can be done with one developer, we would not reject the idea.
What about the current status of the United Methodist Church and the potential changes? At this time, no one knows the future of the United Methodist Church. There are many potential scenarios with even more potential outcomes. At this time, all we can do is trust that we are continuing to live into God’s call and plan for Bothell United Methodist Church, and we move forward boldly into that holy work.

Who can I contact with all of my great ideas?

The Team: BothellUrban@Bothellumc.org

In addition, we heard some positive remarks about how this could be like the Hangar in Kenmore, finally a place for people in Bothell to meet up, excitement that there could be a place for seniors and college students to gather together, and even one person who said: “It’s where we belong.”

You are invited to write or sketch your ideas for the downtown space at the art wall, outside the Chapel. If you would like to be involved in this project, or have ideas, please feel free to email BothellUrban@BothellUMC.org.

Signed,

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Deacon Community Engagement

Reverend Joseph D. Kim
Lead Pastor