

Our Meetinghouse: Can We Afford to Keep It?

Agenda for Sunday, April 29th, 12:30 - 1:45 PM, Library

The Homewood Friends Meetinghouse, opened in 1922, is a building that has provided the physical home and a spiritual touchstone for the Meeting for 90 years. As an aging building, it has many needs for both ongoing upkeep and significant repair that require commitment, labor, and financial resources. In conversations, some Friends have raised the question, "Can we afford to keep up the building?" Members of the House and Grounds and the Trustees Committees will update Friends about our fiscal and human resources in relation to the needs of the building, both in the near and medium term. This is simply an initial exploration of the topic with more discussion likely to follow in the coming year.

Opening Worship 12:35 – 12:40

Welcome and Overview 5 minutes

- Dimensions of this topic
 - Spiritual
 - Practical
 - Fiscal
 - History/Tradition
- Goal for Today
- Process
- Record of Today

Brief Report on the State of Homewood's Financial Resources (Trustees) 10 minutes

- Questions and answers for clarification

Brief Report on the State of Homewood Friends Meetinghouse (House and Grounds) 20 minutes

- Questions and answers for clarification

Worship Sharing

Topics and Queries for Consideration in Future Consideration/Discussion

Closing Worship

Started at 12:35; Adjourned at 2:15

Present:

Aimee Pohl
Stan Becker
Eilee Boylan
Rich Bruning
Herb Clark
Nancy Clark
Miles Davis
Teresa Dutton
Graham Entwistle
Rosetta Graham
Polly Heninger
Jody Hopkins
Louise Hopkins
Bess Keller
Kendall Kennison
John McKusick
Charlie Neill
Rachael Neill
Mibs Pell
Rep Pickard
Michael Prior
Heather Ravlin
Bill Roberts
Charles Robinson
Chris Rutkowski
Zora Salisbury
Susan Russell Walters
Kathleen Wilson

Key Points from Financial Resources (see two reports – Financial Summary for 2011 and Investment Performance vs. Expenses

We have been recovering from a huge loss in investment portfolio value in 2008 of nearly \$500,000. The overall value of the portfolio – our endowment - has not yet regained the level of 2007 despite reducing the percentage that we harvest for our operating budget each year. Our operating budget has three main components of income: a fixed percentage of the endowment, contributions and fees from the rental of our building. By far the largest share is money from our endowment.

We do have the financial resources to undertake major repairs on the building. However, to use the endowment in this way would significantly diminish the value of the endowment and consequently, the annual contribution from the portfolio to the Meeting's operating budget. Alternatively, we could try to finance major repairs through a fund-raising effort.

The insured value of the building, including replacement of contents, is \$1,550,000. However, an appraisal of the building and land (not taking into consideration contents or improvements) was \$855,000. The appraiser feels that the figure of \$855,000 is close to current market value.

Key Points from the State of Meetinghouse Facility

We have a building that is 90+ years in age. It is well constructed and has been well cared for, but needs continuous attention to upkeep, maintenance, repair, and improvement to meet changing needs.

Although never hasty or quick to act, the Meeting has undertaken and completed some major projects in the last twenty years including a new copper roof, an elevator, solar panels generating 50+% of our electricity needs, modernization of the plumbing system, painting the worship room, and replacement of the furnace. Ongoing attention to reduction of the mold in the building has been a recurrent theme.

There are major projects which could be undertaken if the will and resources are available, including repair of the foundation, ventilation of the building, etc.

We employ a cleaning service and are the beneficiary of the attention and care of Chris Stadler and David Penney. Beyond the work of these people and the efforts of House and Grounds, there is still routine maintenance and upkeep as well as repair jobs that need to be done by members and attenders of the Meeting, most often during work days. Commitment of time from members and attenders has been flagging in recent years and the burden has grown for the House and Grounds Committee and, especially, its clerk, Graham.

In summary:

The question, "Can We Afford to Keep the Meetinghouse?" is multifaceted and involves an assessment of our ability to commit time, energy, skills, and talents to the care of the building, the availability of financial resources and the consequence of using those financial resources for the building rather than another purpose.

Points and Questions that Arose in the Discussion and Subsequent Worship Sharing:

What kind of community do we wish to have? Do we wish to grow? If so, in what ways and how should we grow? Does our building aid or deter us from growth? What is our mission as a Friends meeting? What is our identity both common with and distinct from our Friends at Stony Run?

What do we value most highly about our meeting? Our worship space –psychological, spiritual, and physical? Does the space that we use for Meeting for Worship support the process of nurturing the Spirit among us? Our building as a base of operations with paid staff who help us achieve our goals? Our community presence and outreach in Charles Village? In Baltimore City? With Johns Hopkins University?

Could we benefit from a process, such as Quaker Quest, to help us to identify what we value in our community and to help us envision what community we wish to become?

To use an analogy with a private household, “do we have too much house for our strength and means?” Is it time to “right size” our house?

Is there any sense of urgency for us to make this decision in the next 1 – 3 years? 3 – 5 years? What is the time frame for this decision?

Is the problem of mold, a significant health issue to some and a quality of experience concern for others, critical to solve?

What can we learn from our history that may help us make decisions? Are there other stakeholders in this decision, eg., BYM Friends. We know that our meeting’s heritage includes several different meeting places and buildings in Baltimore.

We know that our building was designed and built for a different purpose than it has now, namely to serve Yearly Meeting. As a Friend experienced with design principles stated, there is a disconnection between the architecture of the space (authority in the facing benches, establishment in the monumental scale of the facade, and an appeal to rationality in the classicism) and the values/identity of the Friends gathered therein. Visitors may be confused by that, or sense the tension. The building well reflects the people who built it.

What can we learn from other Meetings that have moved from one building to another? How did they know that it was time to make this change? In what ways does their current building support the needs and goals of the meeting? Would it be helpful for us to visit other meetings to see how they use their space to support their program?

It is hard to grapple with this decision without a concrete and clear sense of the choices involved. What are the options?

- Sell our building and join Stony Run
- Sell our building and purchase another building better suited to our needs and ability to maintain.
 - Within this option might be the possibility of swapping our building for another building in the area by working with Johns Hopkins University or a friendly developer.

- However, as more than one Friend stated, if we don't have enough energy collectively to do things for the Meetinghouse now (e.g. poor turnout at work days sponsored by House and Grounds), how can we expect to have energy to do all that is involved with a move?
- Stay in our building and do the best that we can with the financial and human resources that we have to maintain the building. Within that option, we could consider developing new financial resources through fund raising and/or increased building rentals.

What are the next steps for us to take in this process? How do we gain clarity as a community about whether we should stay in this building or find the best option for a different building suited to our needs?

Possible next steps mentioned during the meeting included:

- Investigate whether having a Quaker Quest workshop, which has been valuable to other Meetings, might help us to clarify our goals for the Meeting community.
- Get a more detailed appraisal of the value of the building. The estimated cost for this would be \$1,000.
- Talk to the folks at Seawall development about our space, about potential uses they might imagine for it, and about alternative locations for us (including McKim). They might have the intuitive sense of the approximate values and costs of things, and are experienced in creating community-oriented spaces. A link to an article about them: <http://www.sheepless.org/magazine/shorts/seawall-responsible-developers-baltimores-artists-and-educators> . They may know how to preserve the building. Going to Hopkins first would most likely doom the building, and they would probably work to box us in on price. We should work on developing alternatives to Hopkins.