

Big House Committee Report: Executive Summary

The Session formed the “Big House” committee in October 2023, with the charge to consider options for how best to ensure PPC can remain a vibrant servant of Christ through the year 2038, 15 years from now. The BHC’s mission was to provide options, not to make decisions. Decision making responsibility lies with the Session and congregation.

BHC’s analysis, discussion of options, and recommendations focus on five critical issues: financial considerations, building cost, building use, programs and services, and congregation and community.

Financial Considerations: For several years, Park Church has been depending on withdrawals from the endowment fund to support the annual budget costs. Our analysis indicates that PPC could maintain itself for 10 years or longer by spending down its endowment. The committee recommends that the Session: (1) use 3 to 5-year plans as a foundation for strategic decisions on the future of the congregation, and (2) identify a set of metrics and red flag points that can be used to determine the critical mass necessary, both financially and in terms of members, for the church to remain viable in this space. At some point, it may be necessary to sell or lease the church property. The report briefly reviews what would happen in that circumstance.

Building Cost: A common belief is that building-related costs are a significant driver of congregational expenses. Our analysis of building costs involved a breakdown of the last three years of church expenses and consideration of the costs and potential savings in two options: (1) selling the building and moving; or (2) remaining in the building. Our recommendation is to remain in the building, spending down the endowment funds as necessary and reexamine the status in three to five years.

Building Use: PPC has a building that is too large and not effectively used for a congregation of our size. While the building is used for many community functions, these functions do not provide revenue to support the building’s operation. Two options for alternative uses for our building were discussed: (1) renting space to other organizations; and (2) getting additional community into the facility. BHC’s analysis indicates that if another religious organization moved into the building, minimum updates and changes would be required. However, change of use of the building would involve significant building code upgrades. We recommend expanding the use by groups already in our facility and/or identifying other groups or segments of the community population whose needs could be met by making use of the building.

Programs and Services: The analysis revealed that program and operating costs, including labor, represent a larger percentage of the budget and have a greater impact on expenses than building-related costs. The committee spent significant time analyzing and discussing the impact of pastor time on the budget. The committee’s recommendation to the PNC is to search for a full-time pastor to serve through the duration of the first 3 to 5-year plan. After that period, consideration should be given to moving to a part-time pastor sharing administrative duties if the financial picture does not improve.

Congregation and Community: Our discussions led to the conclusion that the church of 2024 has financial challenges resulting more from social and community demographic changes than to building related issues. To be a thriving church in 2038 we need to better understand the needs of our community and how Park Church can provide a positive impact on the community. The next 20 years will be better if we can collaborate with other churches, pool resources, and learn from each other.