

St John's United Church

Neighbourhood Newsletter

Issue No. 2
April 2009

Introducing the S.P.I.R.I.T. Project

Community Feedback on Our Initial Concept



Our first newsletter in December explained that the congregation of St John's would be moving to a temporary home in the Maritime Conservatory and that we hope to redevelop the site on Windsor and Willow to accommodate both a new, smaller church and a seniors' independent living complex.

We invited our neighbours to join us at two informal Sunday morning sessions and also to two design charrettes. We also understand that there have been some other gatherings to discuss the future of the church site.

So far this is the feedback we have heard. Some people are very supportive of what St John's is trying to do; others have concerns. These concerns include:

Height — the existing church is equivalent to 4-5 storeys; the concept would be somewhat higher — how might this affect neighbouring houses?

Density — how many people might live in the new building and what would be the effects on traffic, parking and perhaps the stability of the lower-density neighbourhood?

Parking — the building would have underground parking for its own residents, but would it generate additional short-term parking on residential streets?

Viability — could a seniors' enriched independent living concept sustain itself?

Alternatives — could the existing church building be renovated and restored; could the site be redeveloped as single family housing or town-

houses or even a park?

Neighbourhood involvement — is St John's open to involving residents in the development of the concept?

In this second newsletter we want to share information about the current status of St John's new home project and some thoughts (not necessarily complete answers) about the issues being raised.

S.P.I.R.I.T.

Our working title is the SPIRIT Project — the acronym encompasses the six principles that underpin our proposal.

Seniors — supporting them to stay in the community

Public engagement — sharing and listening

Inclusive to all — affirming, accessible, welcoming

Respect for the Earth — "green" building

Intergenerational — providing a place where the generations can meet

Transforming — our relationships with each other and our community

We Made The Move

On January 4 we started our Epiphany service in the sanctuary of St John's United Church on the corner of Windsor and Willow, and then, led by a bagpiper and with the children of the congregation carrying the special objects and symbols, we walked to the

Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts on Chebucto to finish the service.

We are leasing use of the Lillian Piercey Hall — probably for two years. One result of this move is that we are no longer burning many litres

of fuel oil a year to heat our old building.

The building is being inspected daily and of course the sidewalks will be cleared and the grass will be mown.



We leave our old home



....and arrive at our new home



Please Get In Touch

We really want to hear from you.

Drop us a line at stjohnsunited@hfx.eastlink.ca

Or call Reverend Linda Yates at 423-8498.

Learn more about us on our website www.stjohnsunited.com.

Our Thinking To Date on the Redevelopment Concept

Our project is still at the concept stage. We have not hired an architect or drawn up plans. These are the elements we know we want to include:

- ◆ A smaller, "greener" church that incorporates aspects of traditional church architecture.
- ◆ Church interior space that is flexible and multi-use, usable by the residents of the attached seniors housing, and continues to accommodate community organizations and activities.
- ◆ An enriched independent living

complex that offers seniors convenient, accessible apartments, together with optional supportive services plus a sense of community and connection.

- ◆ St John's is an Affirming Congregation — we welcome and support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons. Our seniors complex would also be open and welcoming to all.
- ◆ Supportive housing options that are less expensive than current alternatives.
- ◆ Underground parking to accommodate residents' and church

staff vehicles.

- ◆ Building design and construction to minimize our carbon footprint, and a structure that is attractive, low maintenance, and durable.
- ◆ Close attention to street level details, to be a friendly, street-oriented presence on Willow and Windsor Streets.
- ◆ Formation of a non-profit entity to develop and operate the complex, with community representation on the board of directors.

Alternative Scenarios

After a lengthy process, our congregation felt called to stay together and continue our presence in this part of the city. This led us to our hopes for redeveloping the site. But, we are aware of alternative scenarios.

Renovating and restoring the church — this would cost several million dollars at a minimum. We would be left with a 90 year-old building that is still too big, too costly to heat, and not adapted for community outreach. The church was poorly constructed and has major structural problems.

Selling the church to another church, or to a developer who would restore and adapt the building for

another use — for all the reasons above, this seemed unlikely.

High end condominiums — many expensive condominiums are being built on the peninsula. We want to make use of our location to provide opportunities for older people who cannot afford these options.

Redeveloping the site at an R2 density — e.g. single family homes or townhouses. The costs of demolition will be very high. Therefore the lower density option is unlikely to be feasible for either the congregation or a developer.

Demolishing the church and creating a park — HRM would have to

pay for the cost of the land and the demolition. HRM is currently trying to sell some of its properties rather than buy new ones.

Selling to a buyer who would redevelop the whole site — if St John's is unable to redevelop the site to combine a new church with some form of community-based housing, we would likely have to put the whole property up for sale. We have no idea whether there would be a purchaser and what plans they might have for the site. Meanwhile the building would sit idle and would continue to deteriorate.

Neighbourhood Impacts, Involvement and Ideas

We recognize that our neighbours (some of whom also belong to St John's) will have concerns about the possibility of a new development in their midst. We are committed to working with you to reduce impacts, and design the new building to be an

attractive and a positive presence on the street. Therefore we need to hear your ideas — and your criticisms — and will do our best to work with you to resolve problems and enhance opportunities. We see this as an opportunity to create new community

meaning and value out of an old, outdated building. We will

- ◆ hold neighbourhood meetings
- ◆ explore options such as a stakeholder advisory group
- ◆ keep our website up to date
- ◆ keep these newsletters coming.