



Building Project Update - June 2014

Things seen, unseen and green

A local merchant who makes the daily drive by North Parish recently commented, “I see you’ve finally started construction!” With framing now rising from the ground, everyone can see visible signs of the new building that will bring all of our staff and programming activities “Together Under One Roof.”

While construction actually started a few months ago, it lay hidden behind safety fencing and below sightline. Hidden, too, are many features of our new building – subtle but significant choices that will help us save on energy costs and be better stewards for our environment.

Meg Ansley and Debb Putnam, members of the House & Grounds committee, recently attended a sustainability workshop sponsored by Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light, a non-profit organization whose mission is to offer a religious response to climate change. Attendees at the workshop included members of many different faiths – in addition to several Unitarian Universalist congregations, Baptist, Congregational, United Church of Christ, and Hindu faiths were represented.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that houses of worship are among the *least* energy efficient in terms of percentage of use. Like us, most congregations represented at the workshop occupy older buildings and deal with large spaces like our sanctuary – minimally used and expensive to heat – and other irregular, sparsely managed program space used by a wide variety of groups.

While there is work we still can do, it was heartening to note the improvements we’ve already made or are now underway that have given us a head start – all pushed by our last and current building projects. In our last project we installed LED exit lights, programmable thermostats, dimmable lights, light sensors, and automatic shutoff on bathroom water faucets. The new construction includes additional lighting upgrades, improved insulation, high efficiency heating/cooling/hot water systems, and a more efficient kitchen range (electronic ignition vs. open, “always on” pilot lights).

Improvements such as these come at an initial cost but offer long-term savings. As an example, in our current project we made a choice to use LED fixtures for new overhead can lights and wall sconces. The initial “add” to our project’s cost was approximately \$10,000, however, energy rebates cut that cost almost by half. Anticipated energy savings bring the payback calculation to 4-5 years. Offset by a potential 20-year lifespan for the bulbs, the choice was a pretty easy one to make.

Energy saving strategies such as these – some intentional, some mandated by evolving building codes – represent both environmental and financial stewardship. In harmony with our seventh principle – “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part” – they also save us money that can then be redirected to programming and outreach, as well as setting a model for how we can carry this stewardship into the larger community through improvements in our own homes.

An investment in our future – it takes many forms!

Is this “new” news to you? For more information, contact any member of the Building Task Force – Debb Putnam, Peter Calkins, Don Schemack, Michele Sherry, Ron Zelle; or check previous updates posted on our church website under the tab Support Us: Capital Campaign.