

### **Project 3: Building a New, Net-Zero Parish House for Old Ship Church**

In 2016, our Parish House seemed no longer suitable to serve the needs of Old Ship Church. Originally a 19<sup>th</sup>-century single-family home, the building now presented problems for both maintenance and function. Maintenance seemed no longer feasible for our community; problems included a leaky basement, leaky storm windows, inadequate insulation, a roof in need of replacement, an exterior in need of repainting, the main driveway in need of repaving, and an ancient furnace for which crucial parts were no longer manufactured (making repairs impossible and, thus, risking major damage from frozen pipes). The building's size and configuration also seemed no longer to serve our needs as a parish. Two options presented themselves: sell or renovate.

#### **The First Option: Selling the Parish House in Order to Build a New Net-Zero Structure**

In 2016, we put the Parish House on the market and began planning a new facility on land next to our beloved and precious 17<sup>th</sup>-century Meeting House. As a Green Sanctuary, we take very seriously our commitment to green building best practices. Having a net-zero Parish House was an aspirational goal which presented many difficult challenges to a congregation, starting with the problem of funding, which was very dependent on our success at selling our current building.

After surveying staff, religious education teachers, and the congregation, we made preliminary estimates of how much money would be needed to build a new structure; we assessed current building configuration, the dimensions of various rooms, and the functions they were serving. We made preliminary estimates of needed square footage: how small could our newer, greener structure be without impeding crucial functions?

With regard to the new building's site beside the Meeting House, we investigated the processes by which we might obtain necessary building approvals from the local and national historic preservation agencies now protecting the Meeting House, its site, and its environs. Our Meeting House, a National Historic Landmark, has stood on Hingham's Main Street since 1681. It is the only remaining 17th-century Puritan meeting house in the U.S. The Massachusetts Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and the Hingham Historic Districts Commission also have a say in what happens to the Meeting House and the property around it. <http://oldshipchurch.org/history.html>

Throughout the next three years, we tried to sell the Parish House. We received several offers, but prospective buyers withdrew due to factors ranging from neighborhood opposition to insufficient financing. We reduced the price once but, in the end, were unable to realize the amount needed to construct a net-zero, purpose-built, fully accessible new building. The congregation voted on October 27, 2019, to take the Parish House off the market.

#### **The Second Option: Renovating the Parish House for Greater Energy Efficiency**

We had foreseen in 2016 that selling the Parish House might not raise enough money to build a new one. In that case, we planned to renovate within our funding capacity, bringing to that project the same commitment to green building practices as we would have brought to a new building.

Since 2016, some repairs have been postponed and maintenance deferred while we tried to sell the Parish House. A generous Old Ship donor has offered \$350,000 to be used solely for creating as "green" a building as possible. These measures could include an efficient heat pump HVAC system, solar

system, better insulation, new windows, and longer-lasting exterior paint. At our Annual Meeting in 2020, the congregation will vote on whether to accept the donation.

At the end of 2019 and in early 2020, the Building and Grounds Committee (B&G) and other interested parishioners made several walk-throughs of the building and its grounds to assess which projects are most important before an emergency occurs. In addition, specialists were invited to address heating system upgrades. This information was compared to an energy assessment of the building conducted in 2007.

Later in February 2020, the sexton and professional carpenters from outside and among parishioners surveyed the building. They discovered peeling paint, wood rot and likely hidden damage on the exterior of the building. They also found water leaks in the basement causing foundation issues, termite damage in the walls of the fellowship hall, roofs that need replacing, chimneys that need repointing, and windows that need restoration.

A representative of Mass Save, a collaborative funded by investor-owned utilities, installed water flow reducers to all the bathroom sinks, three new energy efficient thermostats and an energy efficient water hose in the kitchen dishwasher.

With all this information in view, B&G created a priority project list with quotes, comparisons, and evaluations. Specific assessments and quotes were obtained from vendors regarding HVAC heat pumps, air sealing, blown cellulose and other insulation, solar panel system, storm windows and exterior ceramic paint which would all be considered "green." Other quotes have been provided for replacing rotted balustrades along the Main Street roof and for replacing flat roofs and the fellowship hall ceiling. An action plan is underway for short-term critical projects totaling nearly \$200,000, and other projects including energy efficient improvements (greening) totaling over \$500,000.

B&G submitted a recommendation to the Board of Old Ship. The Green Sanctuary team will seek a commitment from the congregation to reach as far as we can towards creating a Parish House modeling green principles and sustainability.

