

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated April 2, 2019

The What & Why of First Universalist Church and Shir Tikvah Co-location

VISION & PURPOSE

Why are we considering co-location? What happened to our original plans?

Our capital campaign, *Not for Ourselves Alone: Building an Inclusive Future*, launched in 2016 with a vision to make our building more welcoming and accessible, more useful to our community, and more financially and environmentally sound. We wanted our building to reflect our commitments to racial and environmental justice. First we imagined a new welcome and drop-off center toward the rear of the parking lot. Then architectural review and more thought led us to imagine a more prominent, accessible and welcoming Dupont Avenue entrance. Long looked-for documentation showed that we could build upon the foundation of the Religious Education wing, and we imagined a new third floor full of classroom and meeting spaces. Then, cost came in for a reality check, and we realized that a third floor was not within our reach. All this time, conversations have been happening between the leadership of Shir Tikvah and First Universalist, and we had begun dreaming together about co-location. These conversations grew out of the friendship between Rev. Justin Schroeder and Rabbi Michael Latz who had involved their respective Boards in conversations about strengthening the relationship between our respective congregations. Our two congregations decided to spend September of 2018 through June of 2019 in a time of discernment asking and answering hard questions about finance, structure, and space and program needs, and learning about each other's culture and commitments.

What is the vision for co-location? How will co-location impact our mission?

As people of faith, we are called to live and act out of a prophetic imagination about what is possible as we strive to heal the world and build the Beloved Community. Both of our congregations share commitments to racial justice, ending white supremacy culture, environmental stewardship, and creating spaces that reflect our values and dedication to the community. As a shared house of worship, 3400 Dupont becomes a model for the partnering, collaboration, and new ways of being we hope to see in the world. Finally, by sharing the costs of operating the building, we shore up First Universalist's financial future, ensuring our ability to continue living into and amplifying our mission.

Are we merging with Shir Tikvah?

No, we will each retain our own faiths, identities, traditions and cultures. We will have opportunities to learn about each other's cultures and traditions, and work together for racial and social justice.

Is a partnership with Shir Tikvah bold and radical enough? Shir Tikvah feels comfortable and easy.

Many of us have friends at Shir Tikvah and can identify similarities between the congregations and faiths, particularly around our values of social justice. Yet we have some important differences in our religious and cultural traditions; there is no doubt that co-location will involve cross-cultural work that will challenge and stretch us.

BUILDING & USE OF SPACE

What are the current plans for the building space?

We will achieve almost all of what we hoped for in our original vision but in a different form. The Dupont entrance and atrium will be enhanced, and offices will be moved to the first floor of the Education Wing. The second floor will consist of remodeled meeting rooms and classrooms. The third floor will house a large worship space in the round with movable chairs. It will also house some offices or meeting rooms and a bridge to the balcony and Arches rooms, which makes these areas accessible. The plans include all of the improvements we imagined for our current Sanctuary: new carpeting, hearing loop, an accessible stage/chancel, new A/V, paint, and improved lighting.



First Universalist Church of Minneapolis

Why do we need a third floor worship space?

Shir Tikvah desires to continue the worship traditions developed in their current synagogue (our former building) on Girard Avenue. Congregants love worshipping in the round and developed a joyful tradition of clearing the chairs after services and setting up tables for food and fellowship. This third floor space will be a shared space that we can use outside of Shir Tikvah worship times (Friday nights and Saturday mornings).

Will we have access to the third floor? How will this help First Universalist meet our needs and goals?

Yes, we will have access to the third floor and Shir Tikvah will have access to our sanctuary. The third floor will be a great space for large meetings or workshops, weddings, smaller services and RE and adult programming. It should also be an attractive space for external community events or artistic performances, fulfilling our goal of creating space that is useful for the larger community.

Will First Universalist be able to meet our Religious Education & Adult Spiritual Development program needs?

Yes, we will have somewhat more space with the plans with Shir Tikvah than we would have if we did not co-locate and build the third floor. One big advantage is the third floor addition allows a bridge or walkway to the balcony and Arches room, making these previously little-used spaces accessible.

Won't parking be an even greater problem than it is now?

The practical advantage of co-locating with a Jewish congregation is that their services are held Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. Currently, Shir Tikvah holds its religious education programming on Sunday mornings and would commit to changing this schedule if we co-locate. Nevertheless, there may be times when both congregations sponsor big events at the same time and we will need to revisit the idea of a "park and shuttle" in a neighborhood lot or renting space on occasion at Temple Israel or First Unitarian Society for one of us if we are both holding a very large event. We will need to address parking whether or not we co-locate with Shir Tikvah although we acknowledge co-location will further impact the parking challenges. We extend an invitation to those who want to work on the parking issue to gather.

What about security and lighting in the parking lot, especially with the heightened security concern related to housing a synagogue?

Security is an important concern with or without Shir Tikvah. We need to improve lighting in the parking lot, for example. Providing one primary, well-staffed entrance at the front of the building as part of the renovation will increase security. We know there are extra precautions needed if we house a synagogue; Rabbi Michael Latz brought it up right after the Tree of Life shooting. We are committed to doing it well and doing it together.

Will there be solar panels on the third floor?

We would like to have solar panels and are exploring costs.

COMMUNITY

What about the impact on the neighborhood? Have we thought about this?

We need to proactively address the potential impact with our neighbors. We have identified a team of congregants with experience working with neighborhood groups; in addition, our lead architect, Paul May, has had considerable experience with neighborhood groups and will advise us. Rev. Crow will also seek advice from Unity Unitarian St. Paul about their experience with the neighborhood during their remodel. We are considering what we have to offer our neighbors - things like meeting space, participation in our racial justice and community events, overnight parking, participation in youth events, and so on.

What will happen to Southside Child Development Center?

Southside is interested in staying through June of 2020. When we renovate the education wing, we will not be able to have a tenant and Southside is aware that they will need to move. Our working assumption is that we will not have a major tenant during the first year or two of co-location. However, both Shir Tikvah and First Universalist are open to housing a preschool or daycare center; it could work out for Southside to return if they have not found a new permanent home.



GOVERNANCE

Will Shir Tikvah be our tenant or a co-owner?

Shir Tikvah will be a co-owner of our building. They will invest or “buy into” the building by raising funds through the sale of their own building and by raising funds through their own capital campaign. Ownership may not be 50/50 at the start; ideally we would work toward parity over time.

How will expenses be shared after the initial building remodel and improvements?

Shir Tikvah expects to pay half of the annual operating costs of the building and half of the capital investment costs going forward.

Is Shir Tikvah equipped to handle these expenses?

Our financial due diligence revealed that Shir Tikvah has a strong balance sheet, is debt free, and consistently meets their annual operating budget.

What financial and legal structures will be required to make co-location happen?

We have chartered a Financial and Legal Team to explore these issues; this team consists of members from both Shir Tikvah and First Universalist with relevant financial, legal, and business expertise. One possible model is creating a new entity that owns the building; the building or new entity is then managed by a board consisting of members of both congregations and perhaps an outside board member. Custodial staff, a receptionist and scheduler may be shared staff reporting into the new entity. The two congregations share operating costs including future capital expenditures.

What is the exit strategy if this doesn't work out?

There is no way to eliminate all risk, but we're looking at ways to mitigate risk. We expect this to be a very long term relationship – twenty-five years or more. We will have a constructive operating model and an agreed upon process for resolving conflict. We will determine a process to use if one party decides to terminate the relationship. We have learned about some successful, long term partnerships using a similar model.

Will we be using outside legal and financial counsel to advise us?

The joint Legal Analysis and Financial Foundations Committee consists of legal and financial experts from Shir Tikvah and First Universalist who are well equipped to do the preliminary work. We will use appropriate outside legal counsel to prepare the formal legal documents and operating agreements and to review them on our behalf.

ALTERNATIVE VISION

What is the vision if we don't co-locate?

Our Mission and Visionary Goals are independent of co-location with Shir Tikvah. We remain a vital and growing congregation deeply committed to racial justice. We will not seek another major partner to help fund the renovation and to co-own the building and will proceed on our own with the funds that we have raised. We cannot afford a third floor on our own. We will remodel the education wing, moving offices to the first floor, creating a welcoming and well staffed Dupont Avenue entrance. We will complete the upgrades to the sanctuary: accessible chancel, new carpeting, hearing loop and improved sound system. With or without co-location with Shir Tikvah, we will continue to partner with other organizations committed to our racial and environmental justice goals, just as we do now. We still have a compelling vision for our future yet have lost some exciting possibilities in terms of a new and deep spiritual and cross cultural partnership, synergies around racial justice and other social justice work, and environmental stewardship of resources.

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LEARNING MORE

Will we have a chance to meet the Shir Tikvah congregation?

We anticipate several opportunities to interact with Shir Tikvah congregants and to learn more about each other's respective cultures and traditions over the coming years. We've held one highly successful workshop with leaders from both congregations and are eager to do more. We are invited to a service followed by a meal at Shir Tikvah on April 5. Shir Tikvah Rabbis will teach a class on "Judaism 101" this spring (and Rev. Justin and Rev. Karen will teach a course on Unitarian Universalism at Shir Tikvah). Watch the Liberal, Sunday Order of Service, and website for specific information.

When will we know more and how will I find out?

Information and listening sessions will be offered on the following dates:

Thursday, April 11, 10 a.m.–noon

Monday, April 15, 7–8:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 25, 7–8:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 5, 1–2:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 19, 1–2:30 p.m.

How can I provide input?

You may give feedback at the information and listening sessions, to a Senior Co-Minister or Board member, or via an online form at: <https://tinyurl.com/colocationinput> We have set up a Co-Location area on our website (go to the home page blue navigation bar - it is the last tab on the far right).

DECISION MAKING

How will a decision be made about co-location?

The various working teams will give their recommendations to the Board of Trustees. The Board and Senior Co-Ministers will ultimately decide on the terms, jointly developed with Shir Tikvah, and will bring a proposal to the congregation at our annual meeting on **Sunday, June 2**. This initial proposal will cover the major elements of the agreement, but will not cover every detail of the final agreement. *Please take advantage of the information and listening sessions to be well informed!*

Will the June "vote" be a final up or down vote?

We want to give the congregation plenty of opportunity to learn about Shir Tikvah and what co-location means for us and how it will work. And there is a lot involved in working out the financial and legal issues and preparing formal legal agreements and documents. *Thus, we won't be ready for a final vote in June.* We do want to provide the congregation with an opportunity to weigh in on what we know so far; that is, given what we know about co-location, its proposed financial and legal structure, its implications for the building, and its likely operating agreement, do we want to proceed? The Board of Trustees is in the process of specifying more clearly what we will vote on in June. A final vote about co-location will likely occur in fall of 2019.

