

New Haven Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends

**Threshing session about possible expansion of Friends Center for Children
on Meeting property**

October 18, 2009, ~25 people attended the meeting

Transcription of notes taken by Jane Coppock at the Meeting
with clarifying additions where needed

Opening Statement: November Meeting for Business will consider whether "the Meeting is ready to recommend approving, in concept, a FCFC building on Meeting property". Anyone with additional questions can submit them in writing, before November 8, to anyone on Property Committee. Answers that are available will be distributed to the Meeting before November 8.

Speaker 1

First day school is struggling with space issues in the meetinghouse. Friends Center's expansion would serve first day's needs too possibly.

Speaker 2

There are space issues in the meetinghouse separate from first day school. Expansion could provide the opportunity for Meeting to consider its needs at the same time.

Speaker 3

Should the Meeting absorb Friends Center? Does the magnitude of the expansion point toward consolidation? Would it benefit Friends Center to be separate or to be absorbed and have no separate legal existence? (added question from after Meeting conversation: would it benefit the Meeting to be separate or consolidated?)

Speaker 4

How will Friends Center raise the money for the expansion? What happens if their business plan doesn't work? How much commitment will be needed from the meeting? Does expansion make sense if the Meeting doesn't need the space? Would there be room for a peace and justice hub in the new space, for example?

Speaker 5

What will be the financial and on-going support relationship between Friends Center and Meeting going into the future? Turning Friends Center down would be terrible. Has the Friends Center committee looked for another site within the area of the future clientele of Friends Center that might work? (**Friends Center can answer this**)

Speaker 6

We need assurance that donors are lined up before deciding on the expansion.

Speaker 7

What would happen if the building was built and the enterprise failed? Restricted residential zoning would limit who else could occupy the building. (**Property Committee has description of RS-2 zoning**)

Speaker 8

What is the status of the Friends Center business plan to cover the costs of the building? Would the expansion involve Friends Center and Meeting being together or separate? Need visuals to really evaluate the possibilities.

Speaker 9

In the original agreement between Friends Center and meeting, it was important for FC to be separate, but use meetinghouse space for financial reasons. A condition of Friends Center's use of meetinghouse space was that they would return it in its original condition if they no longer used the space. With the possibility of joint financial responsibility for the new building, doesn't that mean we should re-visit the governance question, i.e. FC's separate incorporation?

Since committees can't use the space Friends Center occupies during the week now, what about in the new building? Are there tax implications (i.e., experience of daycare in New London church)? Would members of Meeting be restricted in their access to the new building because it was a daycare?

Can we preserve the view out the windows in the Meeting room? (Response from Property - This has already been ruled out as a location for the new building).

Speaker 10

The meeting's general support of FC is gratefully acknowledged and assumed in FC's plans to expand.

Speaker 11

The expansion project can feel overwhelming. Property committee needs help from the rest of Meeting to deal with the questions that will come up. The people from Meeting involved with Friends Center inspires our confidence.

Speaker 12

Who locally are the stakeholders in the ongoing growth of Friends Center (in New Haven, Fair Haven, people who are rooted in the neighborhood, the community)? What could be considered for the neighborhood to insure that their concerns are being heard and addressed?

Meeting use of space is currently limited in our access to the kitchen or other resources because Friends Center uses the lower level from 7am-7pm five days a week. How could that concern be addressed in the plans for the expansion? **(Property Committee consideration).**

Speaker 13

It is important to be clear about any possible philosophical differences between Meeting and Friends Center about the mission of FC before embarking on an expansion. The Wilton Meeting faced this problem as the Friends School there kept expanding and finally moved away from the site of the meeting. What if FC needed to add a second or third building after this expansion?

Speaker 14

If Friends Center built a new building, would all FC's activities move to the new building so Meeting would regain full use of the meetinghouse? Who owns the land under the new building? Who will own the new building?

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Speaker 15

Would we, the Meeting, have to buy the land? Who is going to put up the money? How can FC expand to use a building as large as the meetinghouse?

Speaker 16

I am grappling with why Friends Center wants to build here. Where would the building be? On land we already own? Connected to the meetinghouse?

Speaker 17

We need to be clear about what would happen if Friends Center got too big to remain at our site. (Wilton example).

Speaker 18

Would the new building impact our ability to offer emergency shelter space to the city?

Speaker 19

What are the philosophical differences that might arise as we go forward? We should talk it through now.

Speaker 20

Friends Center is one of the primary ways we are known to the New Haven community. What do we want the outside world to know about us, or know us for?

From Carl Newlin on the phone: What would it take financially to stay viable at 12 children? Would the Monthly Meeting be willing to subsidize it? Would Friends Center be willing to stay at 12? Or would a subsidy for a year or two help with the pace of the planning process?

CATEGORIZATION OF QUESTIONS

1) Ownership, zoning

Who owns/would own the land? What are the possible arrangements for joint ownership of a structure by two independent 501c3 organizations? Can you lease land under a building you don't own? Would we need a variance from the city to build another structure and add 5,000 sq ft. to the current lot? Is there a required ratio between built square footage and the square footage of the land owned?

2) Governance and legal status

Should the two organizations merge? What are the advantages and disadvantages for each organization of operating separately or merging? If the organizations are separate, but this was a joint enterprise, what would the governance arrangement be as it pertained to the joint property? What would the decision-making process be for selection of the architect and builder? Who would decide on the budget for furniture, operations, maintenance, and repairs? How would questions of the program of the building and eventual use of the space be decided? How would the ultimate disposition of the property be decided, if it came to that?

3) Funding

How much funding has to be in place before the project can go ahead? If it is a shared project, what would the meeting's financial obligation be? Since a day care has to meet much higher building standards than regular space, should Friends Center assume a greater financial responsibility for the space in the building it uses? If Friends Center ceased to operate in the building, for whatever reason, what would the arrangements be to handle their portion of the financial responsibility for paying for the building? If funding we thought was secure failed to materialize for whatever reason and we couldn't make the mortgage payments or had a partially completed building on the site, what would happen? What are the possibilities for funding from grants or government agencies?

4) Use of space

Would there be any restrictions on the use of the new building by Meeting while daycare was in session? Could the building be used as overflow shelter space? Could there be dedicated spaces for first day school, a possible peace and justice hub for New Haven, and new storage space for Meeting? Since Friends Center thinks it will still need to use the lower level of the current meetinghouse during the week, would there be dedicated space in the new building for Meeting to use during the week for committee meetings and other community functions? Could Meeting use Friends Center space in the new building during non-daycare hours, just as they use our space during non-Meeting hours – for first day school, for example?

5) Operations

What would be the impact on the meeting during construction? Would a new agreement be needed on sharing of parking lot, playground, maintenance of space including outdoors, etc. Would the meeting need to create a separate "planning committee" in order to free up Property to concentrate on the meeting's maintenance needs?

6) Impact on the neighborhood

What impact would the various possibilities of design have on the neighborhood during construction and during operation. How can we incorporate concerns of the neighbors into the planning process? Who are the long term stakeholders in the neighborhood and the city that we should be involving in the process?

7) Quaker witness

Friends Center is probably the most visible representative of our corporate witness to Quaker principles. Do we want to use the occasion of the expansion to consider whether we want to expand our witness in other directions too and if so, what implications does that have for the configuration of the new space? Are Meeting and the Friends Center in a state of clearness about the mission of Friends Center and the possible directions it could take in the future (expansion into a Quaker school, for example, or creation of non-daycare activities sponsored by Friends Center that would take place during the summer on site?)