

Frequently Asked Questions and Additional Information

First Parish Church
Feasibility Study Interviews
Nov. 5-10, 2016

Pilgrim House Modifications FAQs

Why do we need to make changes to Pilgrim House?

The Facilities team identified the following issues that need to be addressed in Pilgrim House:

- Accessibility to Fellowship Hall
- Accessible bathrooms
- Energy issues/climate control
- Improved connection with Sanctuary
- Additional meeting space
- Sunday School Space/Learning Land space
- Parking
- Other Accessibility Issues (Parking lot ramp/Push buttons on doors)
- Storage
- Office privacy/sound

Many of these issues are the same ones that were identified in the 2008 facilities team's work.

What is being proposed for Pilgrim House?

The Facilities team has recommended adding an addition to the back of Pilgrim House that will contain two accessible bathrooms on the ground floor and two on the second floor, and an elevator to provide access to Fellowship Hall. In addition, the team recommended developing a better connection/entrance for people coming from the Sanctuary—including an accessible ramp, creating additional meeting space where possible, and making the energy conservation and climate control changes.

Wouldn't repair/changes within the existing building be better? Can't we move Fellowship Hall to the first floor?

The construction of the building makes changes within the building extremely difficult. Our architects advised us that it would be extremely costly to move FH to the first floor, and it would be unsatisfactory space as the ceiling would be too low. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to address many of the issues with Pilgrim House by working solely within the existing building. We concluded that our money would be better spent on building the addition and making changes to the entrance near the Sanctuary.

Wouldn't replacement be better?

Replacing Pilgrim House would have total project costs in excess of \$5.5 million. Even then, given our building footprint, we would essentially be replacing the current building with a newer, slightly bigger 3-story building. We would still not be able to accomplish

all of our wishes. We concluded that spending less than \$2 million on an addition and some internal changes would allow us to address many of the problems we identified.

Shouldn't we wait until the town enacts the new zoning ordinance?

The proposed changes to the town zoning ordinance would have little impact. While they would do away with the current size limit on the building footprint, we would still be faced with setback requirements and our own desire to maintain as much parking space as possible. This limits our building footprint to one only slightly larger than the current Pilgrim House.

Can't we combine lots with 185 Park Row?

Currently the regulations in the town zoning ordinance concerning the percentage of "permeable" space required in lots in our zoning district would make combining the lots difficult, and might actually hinder us with any changes on the current Pilgrim House lot. While the new zoning ordinance will make some changes to the permeable space requirement in the new zoning ordinance, the requirements for 185 Park Row would most likely not change, or change only slightly. In addition, we are concerned that if we combined lots we would lose parking space we now have in the 185 Park Row lot.

Can't we take down 185 Park Row for more building space?

The older front section of 185 Park Row is a designated "contributing structure" to the town's historic district. While demolition is not prohibited, to get town permission would require a significant amount of time and money without any certainty of a successful outcome.

Sanctuary Modifications FAQs

Why are we contemplating changes to the Sanctuary?

As we move forward into our next century as a Congregation, it is important that we make changes to allow all to participate fully in worship services, as well as to provide worship space that is more flexible.

What are the proposed changes to the front of the Sanctuary?

The proposal is to add a ramp to make the chancel accessible, remove pews and add chairs to allow wheelchair access to the ramp and for increased flexibility, lower the sounding board and move the reredos back to more fully reveal the Chamberlain window, and make the pulpit movable and closer to the Congregation. In addition, the proposal would widen and deepen the stairs in the front so that they could serve as risers when the choir performs there. The proposal includes upgrades to the A/V capabilities in the Sanctuary.

Where will the ramp be located?

It would be on the left as you face the front. It goes up the left side, across behind the reredos, and ends slightly to the right of the reredos.

Why not use a lift instead of a ramp?

Our architects conferred with a Maine disability rights group concerning the issue of ramp versus lift. The ramp would not require yearly inspections, periodic maintenance, and ultimately replacement. In addition, lifts can be unreliable, as we learned from the one removed for the Vestry ramp project. Visually the ramp is less intrusive than a lift would be. Many with mobility issues find the use of lifts undignified.

Why are there chairs?

Extra space is needed to make the ramp accessible for wheel chairs, so some of the pews need to be removed. In addition, the use of chairs up front will allow for a more flexible worship space, particularly when the entire Sanctuary is not needed for a service, such as a small wedding or funeral service.

How will the reredos change in the proposed modifications?

It will be moved back and the sounding board lowered in order to allow a better view of the Chamberlain window.

Is the sounding board original?

No, it was added in 1848, two years after the building was originally built, in order to improve the poor acoustics. There were several votes taken over the years to entirely remove the sounding board. Over the years the pulpit has moved up and down as modifications were made, and the sounding board is no longer in proportion to the current height of the pulpit.

Why make the pulpit movable?

This will provide more flexibility in worship. Interestingly, the pulpit was originally intended to be moveable.

Will the new steps hold the full adult choir?

The architects have sized the stairs to hold 74 average-sized adults.

Why not continue using the risers?

Setting up and taking down the risers is a significant amount of work. We usually have to pay our outside maintenance people to do it. Over the years the setting up and taking down has taken a toll on the woodwork at the front of the church. Moreover, we would no longer have to find storage space for the risers.

Sanctuary Historical Modification FAQs

How early did changes begin to the interior of our Sanctuary?

When First Parish Church was built in 1845, it was a unique and intriguing building. Its Neo-Gothic design was a radical break with the Neo-Classical building it replaced. It had a platform to accommodate Bowdoin ceremonies, a high and prominent pulpit, front and center, and the front of the sanctuary turned out to be acoustically dead. The first obvious changes to the sanctuary were advocated by Reverend Doctor Adams and they were the addition of the screen or reredos and the sounding board.

In 1871, Dr. Adams was succeeded by Reverend Ezra Hoyt Byington and he wanted to have the pulpit lowered and the sounding board taken down. He prevailed on the Assessors (the Finance Committee of the period) to lower the pulpit, but they left the sounding board at the height originally constructed.

Rev. Byington, also called for a new organ, gas lighting fixtures, repainting, new carpets, and better heating and ventilation. Gas lights were installed, and they served as the base for electric lights which were installed in 1900. The gas fixtures survived until 1941.

Were there other controversial or interesting decisions in the later 1800s?

In 1881, a committee began negotiating for the present organ. There was a lot of argument about where it should be put - down front or in the tower. The roof of the tower always leaked. Even the editor of the local newspaper urged that the organ should not be put in the tower. It went into the tower.

How about the stained glass windows?

Some of the most dramatic changes in the sanctuary were the addition of stained glass windows in the 1880's and 1890's. Before then the windows had been frosted glass, in a diamond pattern, with colors around the edges. Several of these original windows survive in the Tower.

What are other "decorating" changes that have occurred over time?

There have been other changes in the sanctuary, including considerable changes to the colors of the walls and ceiling. The walls were originally a darker reddish brown than now and the ceiling was blue. The walls were to suggest the earth, and the ceiling, the sky. Because of these colors, the Sanctuary was very dark. For much of the 20th century, the walls in the sanctuary were painted white in response to the previous darkness so that by the 1990's, when there was considerable preservation renovation, no one remembered seeing anything else, much less the original colors.

What about the choir loft?

Part of the 1990's restoration and preservation effort created the present choir loft and the current stairways to the choir loft. Until then, the organ loft was constructed of plywood or other, less than "finished" carpentry, simply coated with a dark stain, and was said to be clumsily perched on the wall opposite the chancel.