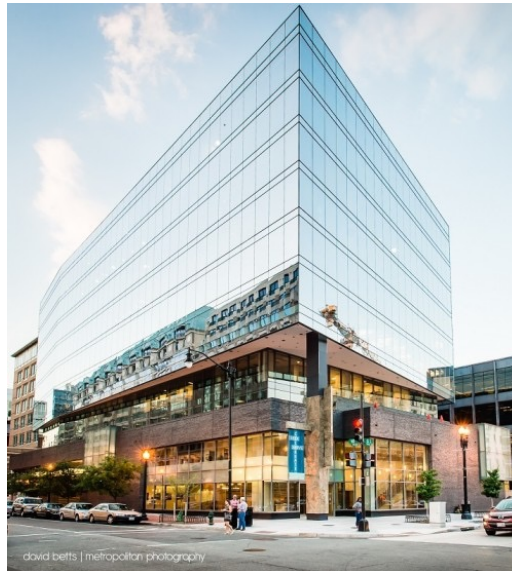


**When Your Building Asset Becomes a Liability...
The Challenges and Rewards of
Redeveloping First Congregational United Church of Christ
10th and G St., NW, Washington, DC**

Meg Maguire, Chair, Site Development Task Force 2004-2012

(This article appeared in the
Union Network, The Magazine of Union Theological Seminary, Fall 2016)



Church Architect:

**Tod Williams Billie Tsien
Architects, NYC**

(Recipients of the 2014 National Medal
of the Arts; chosen to design President
Obama's Library)

Developers:

**2005-2009: PN Hoffman/E.R. Bacon
Development**

2009-2012: Skanska USA Development

Project Architect:

Cunningham and Quill Architects, DC

Construction:

Skanska Construction

The predicament that First Congregational United Church of Christ (FCUCC)ⁱ faced in 2004 is all too familiar to many churches: a building, completed in 1961, that was badly worn out, inaccessible, dark, filled with asbestos and not in keeping with our vision of service to the city in the 21st century. We had

neither the money nor the desire to invest in this non-historic structure. Located on a half-acre site at Metro Center in Washington, DC, the land was worth a lot, but an outright sale and relocation elsewhere was unthinkable because we had been firmly rooted at this corner since 1865.

From the outset, we were determined to be well informed both to be a good development partner and to retain control over the project's direction. Our church council appointed the Site Development Task Force to steer the project and approved \$25,000 from our church budget plus a \$50,000 loan from the denomination to hire four specialists: a *development consultant* to run numbers on the market; a *lawyer* to inform us about the possible structure of a deal; an *architectural adviser* to develop the architectural program in consultation with church members; and a *cost estimator*.

Our long-standing congregational practice of collaboration and democratic decision-making suited this task. Council empowered the Task Force to act on its behalf with frequent consultation and congregational votes on key decisions, and authorized the Chair to be the point of contact with the developers. For nearly nine-years, from 2004-2012, the Task Force worked with the developers, architects and contractors to analyze options and present them to the congregation for a vote.

The Site Development Task Force established two standing committees – *legal* and *design*; and three time-limited working groups – *affordable housing*, *worship furnishings* (to reflect deeply on the meaning for our congregation of the physical symbols of faith – the communion table, baptismal font, cross, lectern - and write their conclusions to guide the architects who designed these pieces); and *fundraising* (to cover custom-made worship furnishings). The *church treasurer* kept track of project finances to ensure that we stayed on budget.

One of our first tasks was to develop a 16-page *architectural program* stating the church's needs and goals. The program ensured that all who competed to develop and design the project had the same information, and it served as a baseline to measure the final results.

In January 2006 the church voted to proceed with mixed-use redevelopment: We agreed to sell the air rights to accommodate eight floors of residential apartments; in exchange the church would receive 25,000sf for our use, 10,000sf for our homeless services program, underground parking and funds for our endowment. The legal structure was, in effect, a condominium that

divides the building, parking lot and common spaces into tax lots owned either by the church or the developer.

In early 2007 we moved out of our building and into another church where we worshipped on Sunday afternoons – a strain on attendance. Demolition followed. Then, as economic circumstances changed, so did the scope of the project. When the stock market tanked, we switched from residential to offices and had to redesign the building. When the Great Recession hit, the developer lost financing and could no longer proceed. After nearly a year in limbo, with an enormous excavation hole, we found a self-financing developer, Skanska USA Commercial Development. Skanska liked our location, advanced design and the prospect of moving quickly into construction with its parent corporation, Skanska Construction.

But Skanska had a non-negotiable requirement: there could be no homeless meals program in the building. This was wrenching for the church and the program. However, the timing roughly coincided with the termination of ThriveDC's lease in our interim space, its need for larger space, and its relocation to another neighborhood where as this fine program continues to serve people in great need.

After operating out of temporary quarters for five years, in January 2012 we moved into our new home, still an unfinished, messy, noisy work-in-progress. This was a stressful, dusty period for everyone as construction workers installed and reinstalled stone floors and walls; hung and rehung the huge wooden doors to the sanctuary; installed, cleaned and re-cleaned the 3500 pipe organ at great additional expense; and tore out the kitchen ceiling to make way for a gigantic fan over the stove. Then, with the arrival of our gorgeous new furnishings, the cloud lifted and we could finally begin to live into our future. We had stayed together as a congregation, through thick and thin, with patience and faith that we would emerge even stronger from our wilderness.

From liability to asset.... Today we are blessed with a spectacular, award-winning church that fulfills the core needs expressed in the architectural program. We are becoming more multi-racial, young singles and families are joining, musical groups marvel at the acoustics, event organizers are renting space, and we are financially stable. With new missions and dynamic partnerships, we are serving our city in ways that exceed our original dreams.

Lessons Learned

- Define very clearly what you want to achieve through an architectural program and other criteria *before* signing on with developers or architects so that *your vision drives the deal*. Be explicit about your values, your priorities and your needs.
- Avoid signing up with the first developer that approaches you. We gave all developers the same information and invited them to compete for the opportunity to work with us. This ensured that we chose the best deal and most committed team the market offered.
- Clearly articulate the roles, responsibilities and lines of communication for both your church governing body and your site development task force. Developers want to deal with one person who has the time to become immersed in the project details, can convene and attend many meetings, and has authority to speak for the institution. In our case, this was the Chair of the Task Force.
- Realize that motives for development are mixed: Our church wanted a new building; the developers wanted a healthy profit. But both of us wanted a successful project, and that goes a long way towards meeting the challenges and compromises we faced.

The Final Result

Size:

Church owned tax lots (including 20 parking spaces in the unusually attractive garage, Sanctuary seating 300+, offices, classrooms, community hall, and 2,500sf for future growth)

26,000sf

Class A ("Trophy") office building tax lots	162,000sf
Total	188,000sf

Cost: (Some work by architects, lawyer and developers was done pro bono during the last year of the project and is not accounted for here.)

Church construction:	c. \$18.1 million
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Endowment	<u>c. \$ 3.2 million</u>
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Total	\$ 21.4 million
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Features:

- The project is essentially a condo model. The office building and church share space for loading in the alley. We lease back to the garage operator half of our spaces during the day, and we have use of additional parking in the evenings and on weekends.
- **Gold LEED certified building** (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a building certification program of the U.S. Green Building Council)
 - 90-95% of everything on site (including plantings now flourishing in members' garden) was reused or recycled in other locations
 - Tremendous energy savings

Selected Community Benefits:

- The beautiful, flexible building within a block of all Metro lines has helped to attract many visitors and younger families as members.
- Exceptional sanctuary acoustics have attracted repeat performances of 45+ groups including the 2016 neighborhood concert series of the National Symphony Orchestra, the Washington Bach Consort, the New Orchestra of Washington, and Ford's Theater, to name a few.
- The church continues its commitment to homeless services with a field office of Pathways to Housing and direct services to homeless youth.

Many Union Seminary alumni/alumnae have been or are currently members of FCUCC including several ministers: Dr. Sidney Fowler '00, current Minister; John Mack 1971, Minister from 1984-2007, a major force in the decision to redevelop; Barbara Gerlach 1971; Bruce Hansen 1961; and David Robb 1965. Other members include Union Seminary Trustee, Karen Byrne '07; Dale Ostrander 1965; Ashley Goff 1998 and current Union Student Kaeley McEvoy.