

# Christ Church

E P I S C O P A L

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ccerva.org

March 18, 2021

Friends in Christ,

As we approach Easter, we celebrate Christ's once-for-all victory over death as well as God's promise to bring forth new life in us. You are receiving this letter, because you are a member of Christ Church. We have an opportunity, and **we need your participation and input** as we consider it.

The vestry has received an offer to purchase the 14.5 acres of wooded land which is adjacent to the church and bounded by two housing subdivisions, Bentley and Welwood. This offer came to us after we discovered the county would not approve a modest-income housing development for seniors and neurodiverse individuals and that the only use the county would consider approving is single-family housing at "market rate," meaning housing like the surrounding subdivisions.

The new offer, made by Eagle Construction, is for \$2,700,000 to be paid to Christ Church 14 days after rezoning permission is secured. If this offer were to be approved by the congregation and the Diocese of Virginia, income would be invested through our endowment so that yearly interest-income would pay for the ongoing capital replacement and major maintenance costs of the four buildings that make up the Christ Church campus as well as the parking lot and grounds, along with a small portion being made available yearly for the vestry's discretion. In other words, income would be used to sustain the mission and ministry of Christ Church into future generations.

It is very important that all active members of record of Christ Church have the opportunity to understand this offer, the benefits and drawbacks, and have the opportunity to ask questions and make known any comments they have. As a result, we are offering the following process:

- Individuals submit any questions to be answered as well as any comments they would like to be shared with the congregation by **April 5, 2021**. Please check weekly eNews for the webform to share your questions or comments. If you do not use the Internet, please call a member of the vestry.
- Congregational Meeting Part One: presentation and discussion of the terms of the offer, the pros and cons of a sale, presentation of people's questions and answers to those questions, presentation of comments received. **April 11, 2021, 1 p.m.**
- Congregational Meeting Part Two: presentation of the resolution to approve sale and congregational vote. Hold the date for **April 18, 2021, 1 p.m.** Date will be finalized after the first meeting.

Both meetings of the congregation will be held over Zoom, like our June 2020 and January 2021 meetings. Meeting remotely is important, because we are not yet able to meet in person indoors in sufficient numbers to achieve quorum. Furthermore, meeting on Zoom enables many of our members to attend who would not participate if the meeting were held in person, because of their health considerations.

Please participate in this process by sending in your questions and comments and attending both meetings. On considerations involving church land, it is very important that we consider the matter together, take counsel with each other, and develop a common mind for moving forward together. Either choice will have significant consequences: deciding to sell will invite another neighborhood to be developed close-by; deciding not to sell will create an unmanageable financial strain on the congregation, as we seek to pay for property maintenance.

Christ is here, in the process of listening to one another; and it is our privilege to witness God always bringing forth new life.

Yours in Christ,

*Shirley*

(The Reverend) Shirley Smith Graham  
Rector

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## BACKGROUND

On January 27, 2018, the Vestry adopted as one of its 2018 projects the creation of a Ten Year Master Plan Working Group. The Working Group was tasked with developing a long-range plan to sustain the missional work of CCE through the strategic utilization of its assets, specifically its buildings/grounds and the fourteen acre land gift. The Group began its work in August of 2018 and spent an entire year in a discernment process. The group reviewed but did not replot the solid ground covered by the Facilities Visioning Team in its September 9, 2016 report. Regarding the current campus, the group focused its attention on two issues: the physical condition and programmatic utility of the Church House as currently configured; and two, the Property Plant and Equipment (PP&E) needs of CCE for the next twenty years.

The group agreed that the physical condition and layout of the Church House is neither welcoming to members nor conducive to a collaborative, productive working environment. The estimated cost to renovate the church house is \$456,900. In July of 2019 the Ten Year Master Plan team recommended and the Vestry approved the following: to renovate the Church House according to the Quinn Evans Architects report. (Recognizing the priority of reducing the budget deficit, Vestry was clear that in approving the recommendation, it might be a number of years before the renovation could take place. Eighteen months and COVID later, we now know that a renovation is on hold indefinitely and, if that time ever comes, a new quote will be necessary and it will necessarily be higher.)

The ongoing PP&E needs (\$120,000 a year for twenty years beginning in 2024) informed, in part, the discernment around and discussion of the utilization of the land gift. Early in its process (in November of 2018) the Team held a community conversation with the congregation to share some of its ideas regarding the land and gain additional ideas from members. Over the course of

several months, the Team discussed each concept, gathered additional data, and reached out to subject matter experts. Additionally, the Team secured an independent Market Analysis to ascertain the value of the land given various development scenarios.

In early 2019 the Team began to coalesce around the concept of using the land for multiple missional purposes: to make our small corner of the universe more like God's Kingdom--a place in which people matter, they feel safe, they know they belong, and therefore they can meaningfully contribute; to generate sufficient income from the project to fund the PP&E reserves; to be a perpetual, faithful steward of the land; and to be a good neighbor. The "Living Community" concept—affordable housing for seniors and neurodiverse adults—began to take shape. At the same time as the "Living Community" advanced, so did the recommendation that two acres abutting the Welwood subdivision be sold for the development of a small number of single family homes. The broad outline of these two uses of the land were shared with the congregation in early March of 2019. In two, five-part "Learning Series" held in May and June, and then in Sept/Oct, the congregation was invited to learn more about our community's needs, the development process generally, and how another Episcopal congregation is moving down a similar path.

On October 24, 2019, the Rector met with the anonymous donor of the land to outline the Living Community concept. The donor assured the Rector verbally and in a subsequent letter that he attached no strings to the land and that whatever CCE decided to do with the land was "fine."

The Ten Year Master Plan Group decided to stipulate its consensus in writing through the development of a Request for Information (RFI). The RFI outlined with greater specificity the goals of the development project and requested formal input from potential development partners. The Ten Year Master Plan Team concluded its work in the summer of 2019 and passed the baton to the Project Oversight Team (POT).

In the early fall of 2019, the POT reviewed the responses to the RFI as well as a purchase offer from Eagle on the roughly two acres of land to be sold for single family development. The POT interviewed four potential development partners; and in January of 2020, selected the Better Housing Coalition as the developer of the Living Community. Members of the POT, with outside legal counsel, drafted an MOU with BHC which included the income that would come to CCE as a result of a long-term ground lease.

In June of 2020 the congregation approved the sale of roughly two acres of the land gift, with the remainder devoted to the Living Community. In the summer/early fall of 2020, neighbors expressed such fierce opposition to the development that it became clear that the support needed from the County would not materialize. Given that the development arrangement with BHC could not come to fruition, Eagle stepped in and tried to reimagine the community with fewer units—townhomes instead of apartments—in order to salvage an element of affordability. The County communicated that the only type of housing that would be acceptable on the site would be market rate housing.

In early December of 2020, Eagle delivered a Letter of Intent to CCE's vestry. The vestry asked the Project Oversight Team to evaluate whether this was a reasonable offer. A subset of the team

has done so. They found the offer to be reasonable, but recommended that CCE leadership ask Eagle for some improvement in the pricing/terms. Subsequently, improvement was made in the timing of income to Christ Church.

Pros/Cons of the Sale are as Follows:

Pros:

- Enables us to achieve our three original goals, though differently than originally planned: income for church, to be invested through endowment, primarily for funding ongoing capital expenses of our campus and providing modest yearly income for discretionary use of vestry; supporting missional purpose; being a good neighbor.
- Secures church's ability to physically remain on our campus, enabling congregation to concentrate on raising money for yearly operating expenses. The plant has always needed more income than what the congregation has demonstrated the capacity to raise.
- Makes our management plate more manageable for current and future lay leaders and rector.
- Creates potential for neighbors to "face" the church and be part of our community and enable us to be part of their community.

Cons:

- Selling closes off any future options for using the land.
- Brings neighbors on one side closer.
- Church loses control of look/feel of area across the parking lot