

Skillman Elder Response to Proposed Alternatives to Joining The Hills

(v4 revised 5-20-22)

Helping to provide direction and leadership for Skillman Church of Christ, the church Elders are tasked with careful consideration of any change or opportunity before us. With careful consideration, thoughtful discussion and prayer, we take this role very seriously. We all seek to be the hands and feet of Christ through our decisions and actions, and how those will impact our mission in ministry.

We have, for a long time, listened for and heeded calls for your church leadership to rely upon suggestions and input from the entire congregation, and we continue to listen to and share information with you in order for the members of this church to collectively make a decision for Skillman's future.

Today, there is a sense of urgency in pursuing opportunities because we have all seen the straight-forward [analysis of Skillman membership and financial trends from Shane Calvin and Ken Teague](#). **If Skillman stays on its current course, all of its unrestricted cash and investments will be exhausted within less than two years.** That would mean our church would be unable to pay basic operating costs, such as staffing, utilities and facilities maintenance. Having recognized the importance and magnitude of this issue, we must focus on real opportunities for Skillman.

We have shared the good news and assurances made to Skillman Church of Christ by The Hills. It is also important for Skillman membership to know that your Elders have undertaken careful consideration of a host of alternative paths forward. Each has been evaluated for its potential to achieve our goal that this location once again be the home of a thriving community of followers of Jesus, who go forth from here each week committed to sharing the good news of Jesus and serving the community.

Selling or Leasing the Building

There have been a variety of suggestions that involve selling the church building. These ideas are incompatible with our goal of being a thriving community in this location. We have also had conversations with and inquiries from other churches and groups interested in using or acquiring our facility. None of those have shown the potential for achieving our goal that the union with The Hills provides.

Other Ideas

Skillman members have had an opportunity to see two proposals that have been presented by other members as an alternative to joining The Hills church. Although it remains unclear how these two proposals may be sequenced, overlap or stand-alone, we have considered whether and how they align with the values and heritage of Skillman Church of Christ, and whether they are likely to succeed.

We share our responses here:

1. "Revitalize Skillman 2.0 22," provided by Mark Prude

- a. **Starting a new church.** This proposal recommends that Skillman's current operations and leadership model be completely dismantled. It proposes a complete restart of this church, and suggests it is possible to create a "permanent plan." But the proposal provides no clarity of plan, mission, operations, financing or staffing.
- b. **No leaders identified.** This proposal recommends eliminating all elders and moving to a trustee model in which the authority of leadership has been dispersed among church members in an undefined manner. We all know that, even in the past year, multiple Skillman elders have resigned. Rebuilding Skillman will be a most-challenging and uncertain undertaking. However, we do not recommend moving away from the biblical direction for elders to oversee, shepherd and lead the church.

- c. **Likelihood of negative impact on membership and finances.** Even assuming a ready leadership of this proposal and a cohesion of goals and interests among Skillman members that does not exist today, it appears this “Revitalize Skillman” plan might be developed and *begin* to be meaningfully implemented by this time next year -- more likely, toward the end of 2023. Any plan eventually implemented will take another year or more to actually reverse the membership and financial decline at Skillman, likely putting it into late 2024. By that time, it is almost certain that all of Skillman’s unrestricted cash and investments will have been exhausted by the expense of staff, operations and upkeep for our facilities, which is approximately \$800,000 per year. Under this fairly optimistic scenario, Skillman may need to borrow money, divert cash from the Moeller Fund, sell the building, rent out portions of the building to other organizations, or take similar measures that the current Skillman elders find unacceptable.

2. Proposal presented by John Mark Davidson and Don Williams

- a. **Lack of clarity.** John Mark has indicated in a written statement provided to the Elders (and now transparently provided on Skillman’s website) that the “magazine” he provided at the April 27th Town Hall “is all hypothetical. It is meant to paint a picture of something that could be at Skillman. This might be 2 or 3 years down the road.”
- b. **No distinct value proposition.** As reported in a recent *Lakewood Advocate* article, this proposal is modeled on White Rock United Methodist Church. Virtually every service and program described in the magazine is being provided already by White Rock United Methodist Church or by other Lakewood-area businesses or non-profits, or are things The Hills church is already doing at its multiple campuses and will have up and running at Skillman on Day One – with far more resources, experience, people and certainty for Skillman members, their children and grandchildren, this community, and the world.
- c. **No proven, ready leader.** The primary advocates for this proposal are retired or have other full-time jobs, and have not expressed any intent to quit those jobs in order to focus on this proposal. Instead, this proposal relies upon a promise to hire various paid consultants who would hope to bring something new to life.
- d. **No clear financial support and reliance on rental income.** Financial support for this new proposal appears to rely almost entirely on rental income from other non-profit and for-profit secular businesses, such as renting out the main auditorium, rotunda and gym. Any high-quality, credit-worthy renter of those spaces will likely require a multi-year lease from Skillman, tying up those spaces for years to come.
- e. **Uncertain impact on Child Development Center.** John Mark’s statement mentioned above also says, “We want the CDC to continue to thrive. Any accusation that a move-forward plan would not include the CDC is false and inaccurate.” We believe the sincerity of this statement. However, we must also acknowledge that the video played at the April 27th Town Hall, which was used to support this proposal, features consultants describing how spaces dedicated to CDC would be entirely re-imagined and disrupted, with various invited and uninvited guests and renters from other businesses and non-profits in the Skillman hallways. We, too, are cautious and not supportive of disrupting CDC operations, staffing, childhood safety, or its status as a five-day-a-week, licensed Texas daycare facility.

The above two proposals are reportedly advocated by the “Save Skillman” group, whose members are, by their own admission, not unified behind any proposal or set of beliefs. The Elders have also directly addressed many of the misstatements made by the “Save Skillman” group in our [email to Skillman members on May 16, 2022](#).

For these and other reasons, the Skillman Elders continue to strongly recommend that Skillman and The Hills amplify our voices together, as described in the binding Assurances document. That path is, by far, the most likely alternative to succeed and bring peace within our membership. That path also stands on the shoulders of Skillman’s achievements and

heritage as a house of worship, as well as our mission to make and grow followers of Christ.
Thank you for your careful consideration and voting YES on the matter.