

## MidWeek Musings

The business meetings of PC(USA) churches always make me proud to be Presbyterian. I can remember sitting through after-worship meetings as a child as the congregation nominated and voted for officers or conducted other matters. Those meetings were my first hands-on experience of democracy. Such an opportunity is coming up again for the children and members of BPC.

There will be a called Congregational Meeting after worship on Sunday April 8th for the purpose of 1) electing officers to the Class of 2021 and 2) voting on whether to gift the land at the corner of Church Street and Hemlock to NRV Habitat for Humanity to be used for affordable townhomes.

I trust by now you have read many times about the project to build seven townhomes on the land across from our parking lot. The need for affordable housing in Blacksburg for families with lower incomes is great. Our gift of the land makes an in-town project possible for Habitat, who will sell or lease the townhomes. All seven townhomes will offer three bed-rooms. The two end units will be “life-span” units, meaning the master will be on the main floor. They will all face Church Street with a parking lot behind and one exit onto Hemlock. They units will be designated “low-wealth” properties for 50 years, and Habitat will own the mortgages or be the leasing agent if any of the units are rented.

The process has been unfolding for almost two years. Session began by discussing whether giving the land was in keeping with the mission of the church; and agreed it is. They then met with Habitat Director Shelley Fortier to discuss the project, and ultimately voted unanimously to proceed with the gift. Because PC(USA) churches hold land in trust for the denomination, Session then petitioned the Presbytery of the Peaks to approve the gift. The plan went first to the Peaks Presbytery Trustees (one of whom is our own Bill Neely). The Trustees then recommended that Presbytery approve the gift. The vote of the Presbytery took place, coincidentally, here in our sanctuary last November.

Meanwhile, Habitat applied to the Town of Blacksburg for special zoning. Hearings were held for neighbors and the plan went before the Planning Commission in January and, this month, Town Council. At each step the idea has met with enthusiastic support and gratitude that BPC’s gift can make the project possible. Habitat also applied to HUD for a federal HOME grant to pay for the majority of the build. Word that a grant of \$800,000 has been approved came last week. It is part of the 2019 federal budget, however, so nothing is certain until after that budget is approved.

On our end, the final step is the vote by, you, the congregation to approve gifting the deed to Habitat, who need to hold the deed in order to receive the HOME grant. There are also some steps required by Virginia law that Greg Campbell will shepherd for us. The whole process has felt Spirit-filled and Spirit-fueled thus far! Join in with your presence April 8th, and if you have questions or comments, don’t hesitate to share them. Let’s make meaningful memories for our children.

Peace, Catherine