

Narthex Renovation Update

January 27, 2023

I am pleased to provide an update on the Narthex Renovation project. Let me first recap where things were at our last Congregational Meeting. You will recall how shocked we all were at the prices for the original project. Construction costs at the time we received bids for our project (June 2021) were not only priced far above expectations but also were not capped because the construction industry was facing many unknowns, including short labor supply (due to the pandemic), difficulty securing materials, and soaring material prices. As expected, the improvement in pandemic conditions and resulting softening in both the labor market and materials supply have eased construction risks. We have been following construction cost trends and costs have now stabilized; contractors are more confident in their ability to accurately price materials. However, construction costs have not yet started to decline as demand is still high for commercial construction.

As a Congregation, after evaluating the bids received for the Narthex Project, we determined the best path forward was to reduce costs by paring down the project to essential elements—which we will call the Redesigned Narthex Project. Here is a summary of changes.

- The courtyard as originally designed was completely leveled and the foundation for the new enclosed corridor and bathrooms required excavating all the way to the fellowship hall foundation. The Revised Narthex Project will use an innovative foundation that will **not** require digging all the way down below the fellowship hall. To further limit the amount of excavation and grading, there will be a gradual slope from the existing Narthex down to the level of the time capsule (the book in the center of the courtyard is actually a time capsule). The capsule will not move, and the flower beds on the office side will remain at the same level.
- On the sanctuary side of the courtyard, there will be a level walkway that will lead to a new door into the corridor between the sanctuary and the classroom building. Because the capsule is not moving, there will be steps that lead to the walkway and door to the corridor. If someone has difficulty with steps, they can walk a few steps back towards the narthex and walk on a level surface towards the new door.
- The architect has also redesigned the entry way for the handicapped parking. The original design would have come into the classroom building and down the corridor to a new door into the sanctuary. The new design for the handicapped parking comes in the existing narthex door everyone uses now. To make this entrance ADA compliant, the sidewalk behind the statue and leading up to the narthex door will be raised to the narthex door level. If you are coming from the driveway, steps will lead you to the level of the new sidewalk. Avoiding the steps will require walking a few more paces to get around the steps to a handicap-accessible route. The sidewalk from the driveway curb to the classroom side of the statue will not have steps.

All these changes should reduce the cost of the project.

As this is written, the Finance Committee is considering our financial position and will recommend to Council if they believe it is financially prudent to move forward with the project by sending the construction plans out for bids. If council and finance agree to move forward, bids would be reviewed by Council for recommendation to the congregation. We expect that if Council sends the documents out to bid, the Congregation would be in a position to vote on whether to move forward with the revised project at the spring Congregational meeting.

If you have questions about the redesigned project, please take a look at the plan designs displayed on the Narthex bulletin board. Questions can be directed to info@stmarks-elca.org.

~ Carl Bauersfeld, Building Committee Chair