

Ground Task Force – Update, January, 2025

The Grounds Task Force started preparing for our planning duties by taking a walking tour of our church campus. Several items began to pop up and continue to be validated by our conversations and observations. For instance, there is a need to provide ADA access to our Memorial Garden. Concern was also mentioned of the overhanging vegetation in areas over the existing roofs. During this initial tour, it was also noted that the new west parking lot soil needed infill to deter car damage and that some trees were destined for trimming and/or removal. The soil infill project was completed.

We sense that our congregation needs to be invited, both literally, through organized “walk and talks” and figuratively, by having a welcoming look and feel to the area, to experience not only the Memorial Garden and the Labyrinth but also the beautiful and maintained, but underused, environment between and around the church buildings. Unfortunately, our planned Fall 2024 “walk and talk” with Pastor Nick was canceled due to weather. We will plan another one this spring.

In June, Botanical and Ecological Surveys were conducted by Keith Phelps and Sandra Gillum, consulting Botanist and Ecologist, respectively. In October, a church-wide survey went out asking questions regarding the campus grounds for the various ministries. The results showed a majority of the ministries were interested in using the grounds, if designed for their use. We also interviewed the pastoral and children’s ministry staff. The Director of Children’s Ministry would like to see a firepit, and an event space, as well as storage and accessible trails to support outdoor activities. The pastoral staff indicated a strong desire to provide accessible trails for use, for instance, as a “Grace Trail” and for a Memory Café event. Everyone is strongly in favor of more native vegetative plantings, if possible.

Following our initial fact-finding, we began developing various scenarios involving the above-mentioned concerns. Another concern, mentioned in several contexts, was the difficulty in finding the west parking lot’s west exit/entry. Signs and reflectors were added. (See the Building Task Force.)

Our Task Force looked at several options for a new sign located at the southern entry for the Memorial Garden (by parishioner request) and relocating/renovating the upper sign (near entrance) to make the gardens more noticeable and looking maintained. A design and sign-maker have been selected. We are adding “Sacred Ground” below the Memorial Garden lettering.

It should be noted that while no previous Grounds Use has been considered in capital campaigns, there have been several attempts to use more of our campus. For instance, a garden has been attempted at the northwest corner of the ravine as well as near the north end of the east parking lot. We identified reasons for failures for these gardens as: non-native vegetation invasion, animal migration, and overstory growth stunting or stopping new growth.

Any conceptual and construction plan will consider the existing structural and natural environment such as erosion and watershed control, root growth of trees and shrubs, and building exits. Along with those items, we aspire to create a Master Plan that invites neighbors to use our trail and connect with the Newberry Trail and the labyrinth (balanced with the concern for campus security and appropriate lighting.) Replacement of our exterior sign and near end-of-life sheds, and enclosing unsightly dumpsters are also identified needs.

We sought recommendations for Landscape Architectural firms and we have begun planning informal walk-throughs with, and drafting a Request for Proposal (RFP) for, five to six local or near-by firms. With the assistance of Vince, we will use the same selection process as the Building Task Force is following for Building Architects. We expect to have a Landscape Architect contract recommendation to Church Council in early-mid March.