



FAIRLAWN

Moving Fairlawn Forward

Session 3: Assessing Our Future Options and Directions

(May 14, 2022) Summary Report

The third congregational conversation on moving Fairlawn Forward was held on May 14, 2022, via Zoom. In attendance were 19 facilitators and 48 participants, and 14 people provided input through the online feedback form.

The [Session 3 backgrounder](#) document introduced five possible future directions or strategic options:

- A. Renew our focus as an independent congregation
- B. Form a strong partnership with a community organization
- C. Amalgamate with another nearby congregation
- D. Accept the current path of graceful decline
- E. Close as a congregation

The team recommended that the starting point for discussion about the future lay in Options A and B.

A [video](#) introduced three strategic proposals, each a combination of Options A and B:

1. Enhanced Affirm Ministry, presented by Kevin Doe
2. Seniors' Ministry, presented by Mary Ellen Richardson and Jill Klaehn
3. Centre for Creative Dialogue, presented by Morrey Ewing and Amanda Hancox

The proposals were characterized as examples of ways that Fairlawn could remain viable so that core elements such as worship and music and other activities could continue to be offered.

The backgrounder also included a draft list of decision criteria that helped shape the proposals.

Consultation Process

After a brief overview of the three proposals, participants were divided into six breakout groups. Each focused on one of the three proposals and included a proposal 'author'. The following questions were addressed:

1. What strengths does the proposal have that could be developed further?
2. What questions does the proposal raise that need to be addressed? (What don't we know that we need to know and why?)
3. What obstacles would need to be overcome if we were to go ahead and live out this proposal?
4. What other new ideas do you suggest that we explore and why?

After the breakout session, the six authors reported on what they had heard in the groups that they could take back to further develop the proposals.

Discussion Outcomes

All three proposals generated a significant amount of energy and insightful feedback, although there was less clarity around the third proposal. A summary of some of the points affirmed follows.

Proposal 1: Enhanced Affirm Ministry

Participants suggested that this proposal would:

- help families, providing a supportive environment and a safe space
- meet a need in the community
- fit well with the church's social justice values
- take our commitment to equity and inclusion forward

Participants were excited about the idea of partnering with a community group, and there was strong support for combining this option with the seniors' ministry.

Proposal 2: Seniors' Ministry

Key points raised about this proposal noted that:

- there is a significant need in the community for this ministry
- people are trying to age in place, and this could help address some of the related issues
- it fits with the Canadian demographics of a growing number of seniors
- places like Sunnybrook and Baycrest have long waiting lists
- this ministry would be more far-reaching than the Fairlawn people and neighbourhood

It was thought that it would be possible to find potential partners as there are many organizations that could provide help and might need a satellite location. The program would "provide opportunities for caregivers/partners to connect with others facing similar things" as well as offer "opportunities for intergenerational interactions", perhaps with volunteer students, or people involved with the Affirm Ministry. The ministry could support the faith life of seniors, and "cater directly to the congregation, many of whom are at an age where support services and opportunities for experience belonging are increasingly desired".

Proposal 3: Centre for Creative Dialogue

This proposal intrigued and inspired many members, although people also acknowledged that it was the one that they least understood. Participants noted that the proposal would:

- fit well with the church's values, providing "spiritual, intellectual, creative possibilities" that could be "a catalyst for change"
- "give the United Church a stronger, clearer voice to help shape the dialogue on big issues"
- attract people from diverse backgrounds and a broader community
- enable Fairlawn "to become a "centre" for the neighbourhood"

The fact that the proposal uses the sanctuary was viewed as a 'plus'. The rest of the building could be used for other purposes and the sanctuary could be updated to meet the needs of the Centre. Another advantage is that Fairlawn could start small and then add activities as it goes.

Questions and Potential Obstacles

Participants had specific questions about each proposal (see [full summary of raw comments](#)), but there were also potential obstacles and questions common to all three proposals:

- Funding – how do we obtain funding?
- Community partners – how will we find the right partner, who will “use the space effectively and not be a financial burden on Fairlawn”?
- Volunteer capacity – do we have the capacity to get to the point where programs can begin?
- How are the partnerships and programs going to be managed into the future?
- Building issues – what upgrades would be needed? How do we make the building accessible? What kind of timeline would be needed for that, and do we have the patience/time for it?
- Past experience – what can we learn from our experience with the Fairlawn Neighbourhood Centre?
- Sustainability – some wondered about the sustainability of refocusing on new options. Getting back into the church building is still a work in progress.
- How do we work within the constraints of an older building?
- What do we do about limited parking?

What other new ideas do you suggest that we explore and why?

Break-out group members were invited to suggest other ideas to explore. For a list of these ideas, see pages 17-19 of the [full summary of raw comments](#).

Straw Poll Results

At the end of the session a straw poll was held to test the Fairlawn Forward team’s discernment that Options A and B – “renew our focus as an independent congregation” and “form a strong partnership with a community organization” – were the best starting points for a way forward at this time. The results affirmed the team’s recommendation, with 68% strongly agreeing, 29% agreeing, and 2% disagreeing.

A Note on Redevelopment of the Fairlawn Site

A question arose in some of the breakout groups around the viability of United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC)/Kindred Works undertaking a housing redevelopment on Fairlawn’s site. Ron Ewart from TUCC explained that an initial high-level review of the site by UPRC has shown that the site is not suitable for a UPRC/Kindred Works housing project. Another consideration was that redevelopment could be a long process (5-10+ years) and would not address the immediate sustainability questions the congregation is facing.

[Read the full summary of raw comments](#)