

Information Related to Main Street Congregational Church Building Stewardship Planning Project (BSPP)

The MSCC Community is presently:

- assessing its property holdings
- evaluating the current utilization of the property and structures
- investigating the costs of maintaining those structures
- examining the cost of renovations to improve safety and utilization
- researching a possible sale of a portion of the property holdings, its impact on the Church's mission, and impact on Church finances.

Information on each of these topic areas is being made available here to help with ongoing discussions and later decisions. The information is organized into nine categories. In each category there is a short summary of key information for that topic. Click on a topic from this list to view the summary.

- [Defining Our Mission](#)
- [Overview of Church Properties](#)
- [Current Building Uses](#)
- [Vision Team Analysis of Church Properties and Buildings, Capital Campaign, Church Renovations \(2006-2010\)](#)
- [Parsonage \(Parish House\) History](#)
[Living in a Church Parsonage: Choices Pastors Have to Make](#)
- [Financial Analysis of the Church Overall, costs to operate the Parish House, and pressing maintenance needs](#)
- [BSPP Team Organization & Members](#)
- [Minutes of the BSPP Team and sub-teams](#)
- [Letters to the Congregation](#)

Within each topic summary, there is highlighted text. Click on highlighted text to link to more detailed information or source documents.

All information will be updated and expanded on an ongoing basis, as BSPP teams accumulate additional data.

DEFINING OUR MISSION

In 2006, a Vision Team was formed and worked with the congregation to help discern what is important to us as a community. This was done through small group meetings in people's homes, mailings, meetings after church and informational sessions during worship. On June 4th 2006, a special meeting was held after worship at which time the following 10 core values were unanimously adopted by the congregation. Seventy-one members were present.

Disciples of Jesus - Jesus Christ is the central focus of our church. We show his love to others through our worship, our congregation, and our personal lives.

Inclusiveness - We are an accepting community of faith that welcomes all persons in all parts of church life (including the communion table), regardless of ethnic or racial heritage, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, economic or political status.

Child Honoring - We remember the value placed on children in the Bible and honor children in that way. We welcome them wholeheartedly in all aspects of our church life and will provide high quality and relevant Christian education, so they may apply it to their everyday life.

Youth Honoring - We meet the needs of our youth, who are not children nor yet adults, through programs that will interest, involve them, and teach them more about discipleship.

Faith Forming - We will offer inspiring insight through such things as sermons, worship services, educational opportunities, scripture study and music, committed to the education and spiritual growth of the mind and spirit of all ages, to deepen our connection with God

Partnership - We love and support our minister, making our church a place of love, understanding and joint ministry with the one who leads and teaches us.

Music - We offer a music ministry that reaches out to people in a life-transforming way that they may know God's love.

Stewardship - We maintain our properties and manage our finances responsibly, honoring our past, living in the present and planning for the future, in accordance with our core values.

Outreach - We will reach out to our congregation, our community and the world with spiritual and financial support, food, hands on mission work and a commitment to social justice.

Community - We value the special connection within our church community. We care for each other as God cares for us and treat each person's opinion with respect, and foster open communication.

These were then consolidated into our simple Mission Phrase:

Exploring God's Love, Building Community, Serving God's World

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OVERVIEW OF CHURCH PROPERTIES

- There are 2 deeded parcels of adjoining land with addresses of 135 Main Street (Church) and 145 Main Street (Parish House), Amesbury, MA
 - Note: 135 Main Street formerly had the USPS address of 127 Main Street*
 - 135 Main Street was purchased March 12, 1828
 - 145 Main Street was purchased December 29, 1952
 - Both parcels were deeded to the Main Street Congregational Church of Amesbury in 1955 when the Main Street Congregational Society of Amesbury reincorporated.
- There are 4 free-standing structures consisting of
 - ◆ Church Sanctuary and attached Vestry
 - ◆ Parish House (Parsonage)
 - ◆ Carriage House
 - ◆ Garage
- The properties lie within the Amesbury Central Business District and the Amesbury & Salisbury Mills Historic District
- The Church Sanctuary was constructed in 1830. *The Vestry was built around the same time as the Church building. It was originally located in front of the Church then moved to its present location in October 1865. In 1868 the Church Building was enlarged and an organ was placed behind the pulpit. This configuration of buildings is depicted on the 1872 atlas map of Amesbury (update June, 2023).*
- The parish house was built in the 1830's as a private residence.
- The Carriage House and Garage sit on the 145 Main Street parcel.
- On February 2, 1998 the Congregation signed a lease agreement with the City of Amesbury allowing use of a portion of Church property for library and municipal parking. In exchange the City pays \$1 per year to the Church, provides winter plowing of the parking areas, and waives water & sewer charges for Church properties. The lease term was 20 years, expiring in 2018. The lease was not officially renewed but both parties continue to honor its provisions.
- The property is tax exempt as belonging to a religious organization. The City Tax Assessor does evaluate the properties as if they were taxed and publishes its findings. Currently, 135 Main Street is assessed at \$1,424,100; 145 Main Street is assessed at \$1,439,100.

- No outstanding mortgages, loans, or liens against the church properties have been uncovered. A title search was last performed in connection with a mortgage loan in 2009.

Use these links to view source documents:

- [Detailed property drawing \(2006\)](#)
- [City of Amesbury current assessor's map showing property outlines](#)
- [Town of Amesbury Atlas Map 1872](#)
- [Original 1828 Deed for 135 Main Street \(Church property\)](#)
- [Deed for purchase of 145 Main Street \(Parish House 1952\)](#)
- [Deed for transfer of properties to Main Street Congregational Church \(1955\)](#)
- [Bank Mortgage Release on loan to purchase Parish House \(1958\)](#)
- [Copy of the Lease Agreement with the Town of Amesbury \(1998\)](#)
- [Copy of 2009 mortgage loan and property description](#)
- [Assessor's Valuation for 135 Main Street \(2023\)](#)
- [Assessor's Valuation for 145 Main Street \(2023\)](#)
- [MSCC History 1828-1981 \(update January, 2024\)](#)

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CURRENT BUILDING USES

Church Proper, Church Grounds	Vestry	Parish House	Carriage House & Garage
Weekly church services	Coffee/social after Sunday services	Offices for Pastor and support staff	Thrift Shop
Weekly choir rehearsals	Our Neighbor's Table weekly meals	Church committee/group meetings	General Storage
Occasional music events	NA weekly meetings	Archives of church records	
Occasional services (weddings, funerals, memorials)	Girl Scouts weekly meetings (seasonal)	Music Library	
Pumpkin Patch	Fairs or events with food preparation and dining	Apartment rental	
	Occasional rental for private parties	General Storage	
	AWOL weekly meetings	AA weekly meetings	
		Housing for individuals seeking Immigration Sanctuary	
		Craft Fair, Holiday Fair	

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VISION TEAM ANALYSIS OF CHURCH PROPERTIES AND BUILDINGS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN, CHURCH RENOVATIONS (2006-2010)

In addition to elaborating core values, the 2006 Vision Team was tasked with

1. surveying the Church's mission & ministries
2. mapping future growth and needs
3. looking at the Church's administrative structure
4. evaluating the Church's buildings, operating costs, maintenance needs
5. making recommendations to the Congregation on options to consider.

Defining Facility Requirements to Realize the Mission

The Vision Team and later Woodman Associates Architects (WAA) conducted interviews with groups that made up the MSCC Community including Board of Worship and Music, Board of Fellowship, Sunday School/Youth Group, Thrift Shop, Our Neighbor's Table, employees, Prayer Shawl, Pastoral Relations, Executive Council, Call to Care, Camp Sunshine, Strawberry Festival, Women at the Well. The goal of the interviews was to identify the function of the group and determine the physical space needed to meet that function. The interviews and summary results are compiled in the [Woodman Report Section 6](#) along with the resulting space analysis.

Feasibility Study

The Team enlisted professional help (WAA) to conduct a Feasibility Study of different building configurations that would satisfy the needs requirements. The cost of the Feasibility Study was \$22,140. The Study pointed out some serious structural deficiencies in the existing buildings that needed immediate attention. WAA proposed six different construction scenarios as well as the option of selling the Main Street property and relocating the Church. The cost range for these options was \$4 million to \$6.5 million; with the exception of the relocation option, correction of the structural flaws was included in the estimates. None of these proposals seemed financially feasible for the Congregation. Discussion then shifted to lower cost options that would still satisfy the identified needs. A proposal with a project cost of \$2.7 million split over 3 phases was offered to the Congregation for consideration.

The [full report](#) from WAA in 2007 comprises 12 sections containing extensive information and analyses that are relevant to our current undertaking. ***The BSPP***

recommends that everyone curl up with your favorite beverage and spend the time to go over this report to examine what ideas were considered previously and what new opportunities might exist.

Capital Campaign Fundraising and Renovation Project

The next challenge in implementation was fundraising. The Vision Team brought in fundraising consultant Marjorie Williams to determine what level of monetary support could be counted on for the project and assist in organizing a Capital Campaign. The Campaign raised a total of \$475,787 from pledges and donations. Despite the overwhelming display of generosity from Church Members and Friends of MSCC, only the most pressing structural issues and renovation of the Church Sanctuary could be addressed within that budget. Some minor work was done on the Vestry Building; no issues connected with the Parish House or Carriage House were addressed. A listing of the work performed on the Church Sanctuary can be found [here](#). A rededication of the renovated Church building took place in December 2010.

Subsequent Reviews of MSCC's Mission and Facilities

At the 2017 Annual Meeting, the Executive Council asked for input/information from the Congregation on a variety of topics related to MSCC's Mission and Facilities. Those results can be found [here](#).

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PARSONAGE

History

The first mention of a parsonage in connection with MSCC is an 1889 deed for the purchase of property at what is now 51 Sparhawk Street. In 1891, the property was used as collateral for a \$1500 loan with the funds being applied to a parsonage building fund. The Sparhawk Street property was sold in 1953.

The current Parish House was [purchased](#) in 1952 to serve as a parsonage. The Parish House Building was constructed around 1830. Read the history of the Parish House and the Sparhawk Street parsonage [here](#). Church records show that vinyl siding was applied to the Parish House in 1993. Asbestos removal was performed in the Church Sanctuary basement and Parish House basement in 1993.

Living in a Church Parsonage: Choices Pastors Have to Make

New England churches have a long tradition of providing housing for their pastors as a part of the contract with their congregations. The preferred UCC name for this dwelling owned by the church is “parsonage.” Commonly, the parsonage would be located on church grounds near the Sanctuary or nearby. Beginning around 1980, Pastors and Pastor candidates began to question the rationale of living in Church Parsonages, especially those in proximity to the Church Sanctuary. These are some of the reasons the traditional Parsonage model was challenged.

1. One does not get some of the tax deductions associated with home ownership when living in a parsonage.
2. While living in the parsonage, one does not accumulate home equity. This may have a significant impact on retirement savings/retirement income.
3. Living in a parsonage, especially one quite close to the church may greatly affect the privacy of the pastor and his/her family. Members of the church might believe that since the Pastor is an employee of the Church, and the Church is providing housing, the Pastor should be available 24/7. Unannounced visits by church members may interrupt family meals, celebrations, or resting times. The pastor and family may feel the pressure of “living in a fishbowl.” Some pastors report unwelcome comments by church members regarding lights being left on at late hours, visitors staying over, etc.

4. If the parsonage building has uses other than housing for the Pastor and family, i.e., meeting facilities for Church committees, both parties may encounter disturbances.
5. Repairs are at the discretion and timeline of trustees who must prioritize church and parsonage needs. (A ceiling stain from a former leak in the parsonage bathroom or torn screen door at the back porch may not be deemed as important as other items on the trustees “to do” list but may be an annoyance to the pastor and family).
6. The number of bedrooms, office spaces, etc., may not meet the needs of the pastor’s family.
7. Older church buildings are likely to contain lead paint which would be a health hazard to the Pastor’s family/children.
8. Décor may not appeal to the minister or his/her spouse. Paint colors, flooring choices, etc., are made by others and requests for changes may be met with resistance. (While Aunt Bertha’s floral draperies might be “special” to her, they may not delight the pastor or his/her spouse.)

Recently, some churches have experienced a reversal in this situation and have returned to the parsonage model in order to attract suitable Pastor candidates.

1. Rising housing prices have made it impossible for pastors with young families to afford the purchase of a home, even with a typical housing allowance offered by the Congregation.
2. If affordable housing can be found, it may be some distance away from the congregation’s facilities making the pastor less accessible to the congregation, its leadership, and mission activities in the community.
3. Pastoral tenures are sometimes short. Selling a home within a few years of its purchase may mean doing so at a loss since the equity built will not offset money spent on closing costs, taxes, etc.
4. The parsonage may be more fitting to the pastor’s needs and those of his/her family than what they can afford to purchase.

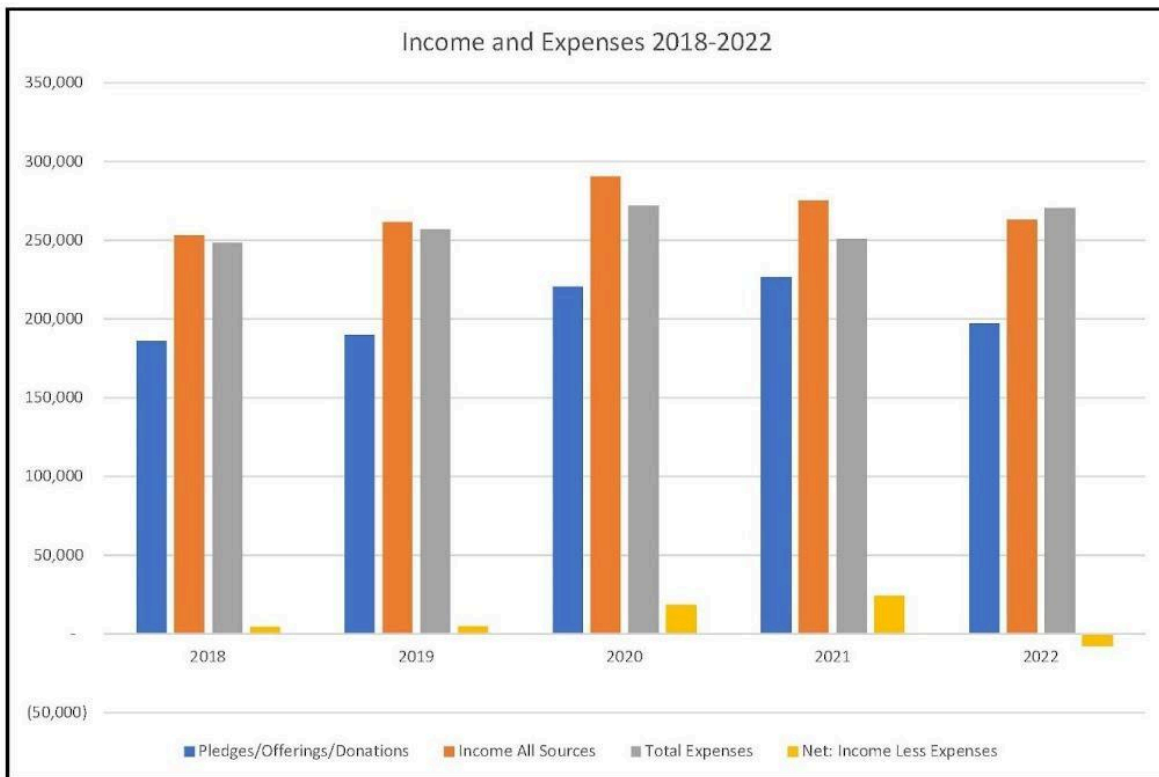
Contributors for this analysis:

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FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

This chart illustrates the Congregation's general financial situation for 2018-2022.

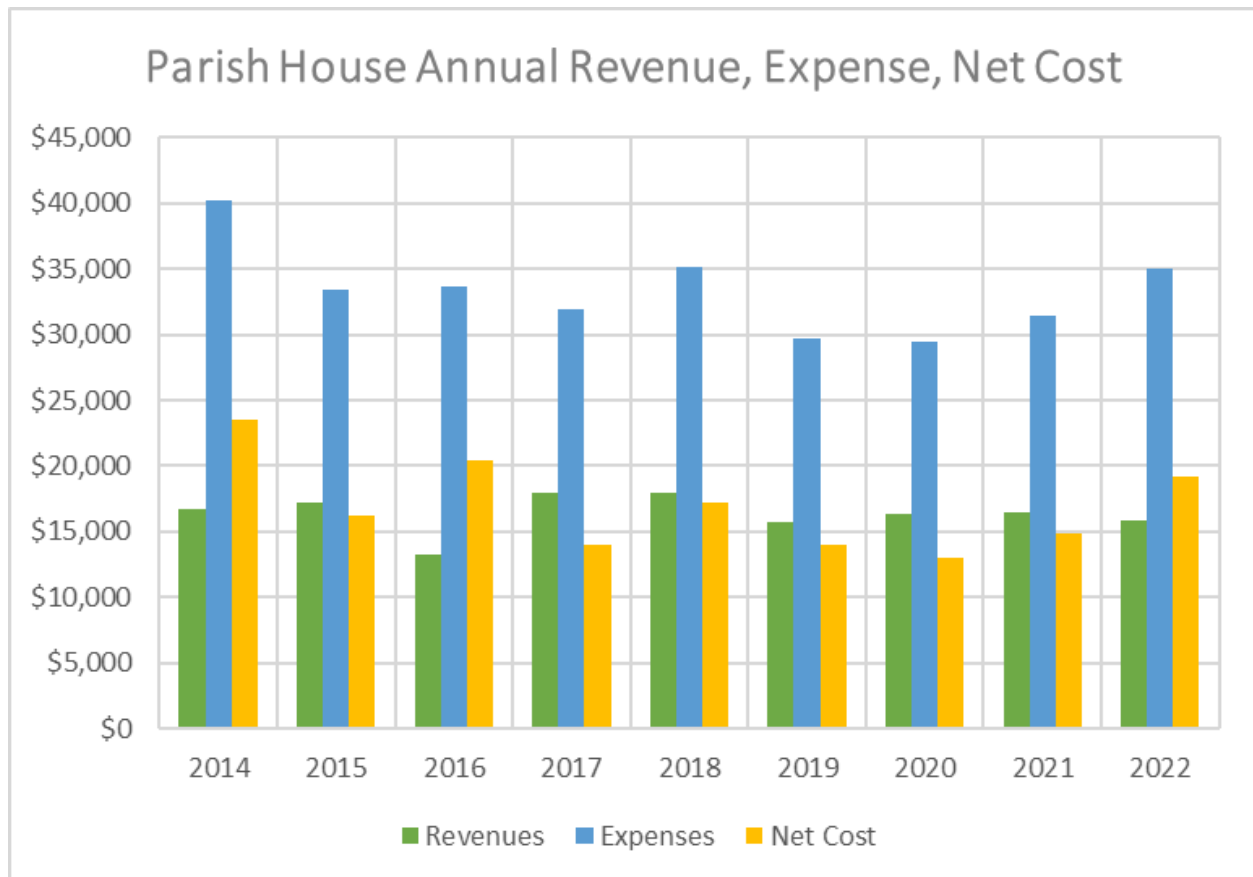


Category	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Pledges/Offerings/Donations	185,915	189,702	220,538	226,453	196,938
Income All Sources	253,153	261,763	290,636	275,179	263,269
Total Expenses	248,535	256,823	271,930	250,857	270,671
Net: Income Less Expenses	4,618	4,940	18,706	24,322	(7,402)

This table shows the average income, expenses, and net operating cost for the Parish House alone from 2014 through 2022.

Average Income	\$16,399
Average Expenses	\$33,350
Average Net Operating Cost (Income - Expenses)	\$16,950

This graph shows Income, Expenses, and Net Operating Cost by year for 2014 - 2022. The variation in expenses from year to year is primarily due to the cost of repairs needed at that time.



Financial analysis contributed by Christine Cressey.

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CHURCH PROPERTY MAINTENANCE NEEDS

Current trustee projects representing significant investments are:

- Sanctuary roof repairs or replacement

- Painting the sanctuary ceiling (after leaks are repaired)

- Brick driveway repair or replacement (*significant liability risk*)

- Vestry floor repairs or replacement, plus structural assessment

- Repairs to garage

- Siding repairs between sanctuary and vestry

- Repairs to kitchen in cooperation with ONT

Total cost of these repairs is estimated to be in excess of \$100,000.

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BSPP TEAM ORGANIZATION & MEMBERS

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MINUTES OF THE BSPP TEAM AND SUB-TEAMS

Compile and add links as work progresses

LETTERS TO THE CONGREGATION

[Announcement of Meeting for April 30, 2023](#)

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